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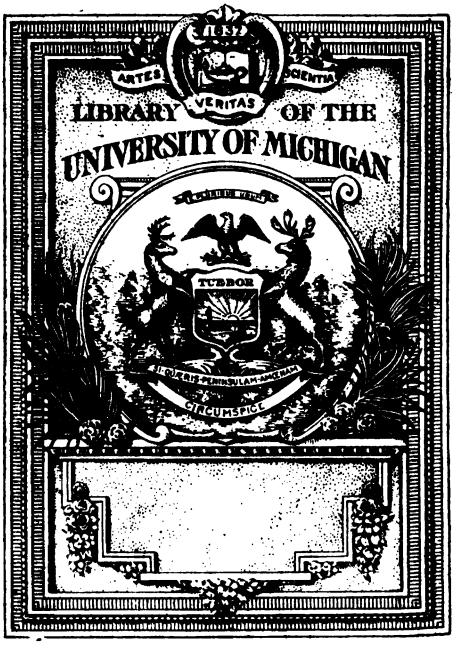

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Yours truly
Mary D. Brine

MARGARET ARNOLD'S CHRISTMAS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

MARY D. BRINE

AUTHOR OF

"GRANDMA'S ATTIC TREASURES" "GRANDMA'S MEMORIES"

"THE STORY OF AUNT PATIENCE"

ETC.

NEW YORK:

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

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TO MY DAUGHTER,

CARRIE LOUISE BRINE,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED.

M. D. B.

317717

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MARGARET ARNOLD'S CHRISTMAS.

ON the hall table (and a spacious hall it was, too) of No. — Fifth Avenue a number of letters were awaiting the mailing hour.

Presently Buttons—of gilt trimmings and ramrod carriage—would gather those letters together in an embroidered satchel, and proceed to the nearest post-office station with them. From thence they would scatter to their various destinations, and fulfil their several missions of wisdom or folly, as the case might be. Margaret Arnold laid a letter amongst those already in waiting, and tripped up the broad staircase with a smile on her lips and a happy light in her brown eyes.

She even hummed a little song softly as she passed through the nursery and into the schoolroom beyond. The children—wee Effie and little seven-year-old

Harry—ceased their noisy play, and ran affectionately to greet her as she appeared.

"Oh, we heard you singing, Miss Margaret! You haven't sung for ever so long!" said Harry, climbing into her lap as she seated herself in a low rocker.

"You don't look sorry to-night, either," he continued.

"Sing some more!" coaxed Effie, nestling her head upon Margaret's shoulder as the young girl put her arm about the little fat figure and gave it a tight squeeze.

"Yes, I was singing, sure enough," she replied, "and I'll sing 'some more' by and by, no doubt, my darlings; but just now, do you know 'tis time for little folks to be dressed and made sweet and nice to welcome papa and dinner? Run away to nurse, and see how quick you can be."

"Yes, but why ain't you sorry any more?" persisted Harry, as he slipped down from her knee. "You look jus' as if something was being glad in your heart, and you've looked awful sober for so long."

"Oh, you rogue! Don't you know Christmas is coming, and ought we not to be glad on account of that?" she said, laughingly.

"Cwismus is good!" exclaimed Effie, nodding a head just full of golden curls, "but my Miss Marg'ret is gooder'n Cwismus!" Another tight little squeeze rewarded Effie for her speech, and Harry

chimed in with: "Christmas is jolly at our house; it's awfully jolly, and we have a lot of presents, too! Do you have nice times at your house, Miss Margaret?"

"We used to, dear, when I was a little girl, but there were more of us then to make a good time for each other. Now, you see, there are only mother and myself for old Santa Claus to come to, and our Christmas times are quiet; but—but we are very happy when we can spend them together, of course."

"I should think you'd be no end homesick away from your mamma so long! I would be," said the boy, compassionately, lifting a little hand to her cheek with a soft stroke that expressed his affection for his pretty young governess. "Won't you be glad to get back home again?" he added.

And Margaret replied gently: "Glad? Oh, Harry, dear child, if you only knew how glad!"

"Sing again, sing a little song to us!" coaxed he, and Effie clapped her hands delightedly at the suggestion. Her little song-loving soul rejoiced whenever her dear young governess would consent to sing, and many were the funny child-songs which the three had learned and sung together during the play-hours after lessons, up there in the sunny schoolroom, with only themselves for playmates and company.

So Margaret, with a child on each arm of the chair in which she was sitting, began the little Christ-

mas melody which the children had heard her humming :

> Christmas comes but once a year,
> Comes to bring the world good cheer ;
> Let us give it welcome here—
> The merry Christmas time !
> Hearts should all grow blithe and gay ;
> Love should chase the clouds away ;
> All the peace it brings should stay
> Till next year's joy-bells chime.

Just as she finished her song, and as Harry was trying to whistle it, the door of the nursery opened and Mrs. Granger entered. Mrs. Granger was a woman of what might be called a "negative character." If she was anything very especially, she was fashionable. She could entertain and be entertained very gracefully. She was quite at home on all the topics of the fashionable world. She viewed that world—and certain portions of the world outside of that particular sphere to which we allude—through the most costly of gold-rimmed glasses, and was complacent with self and self's belongings.

If her voice possessed rather a metallic, unsympathetic tone, she didn't know it. If she was conscious that she never did anybody an especial or intentional harm, she was equally unconscious that she was guiltless, also, of ever doing anybody any especial or intentional good. She wished every one to be comfortable and happy—provided that they could

be so without inconvenience to her or hers (her, first). As she entered the room the little boy cried gleefully:

"Oh, mamma, mamma, listen! Miss Marg'ret's teaching us a new song!" And Effie begged her governess to sing it "jus' once more!" Margaret blushed and turned a smiling glance at the lady, while saying "No" to the children.

"You look particularly happy, Miss Arnold," said Mrs. Granger. "I am glad to see it, for I'm sure you have appeared almost too sedate lately to please me." Then to the children: "Run along to nurse, and get dressed for your father's coming, my dears." And as the little feet pattered merrily away in search of the nurse, the lady turned again to Margaret, and in careless tones—more than usually metallic, poor Margaret fancied—said:

"Oh, I will say now, while I think of it, Miss Arnold, that I shall not be able to spare your services for the holiday week, after all." Margaret grew pale and shivered from head to foot, but made no sound. "My daughter Isabel expects company to remain with us at that time, and the children would be restless and troublesome without you to amuse them, for, as you know, they are not fond of their nurse. Beside, we shall probably need you at the piano, for the accompaniment of songs. Some of our friends have fine voices."

Margaret stood still, but yet no word had escaped

her, and as the mistress of the house turned to leave the room she looked back at the girl as though something made her a trifle uneasy in mind, and continued :

"I am sorry, but of course it can't make much difference to you, as I suppose you would hardly have any important plans for the holidays, and really your presence will be necessary to my comfort and convenience. You must walk more, Miss Arnold ; you look quite pale lately, and just now particularly so. You do not exercise yourself sufficiently, and the children need to be out much more, I'm sure."

She rustled her silken skirts through the doorway, and presently Margaret was alone.

Where had her smiles gone to ? And where was the glad light which only a few moments before had shone out of those soft brown eyes ? Could the girl have sung again, now, her happy song of Christmas-tide and its cheer, as only a few moments since she had carolled it so merrily for her little friends ? Ah, no ; the joy-bells in her heart had suddenly grown dumb, and their glad music had given place to a moan of pain which at last forced itself to the girl's lips, and drove hot tears to her eyes.

"She thinks I would hardly have made any plans for the dear Christmas time ?" thought Margaret bitterly, as she sat down beside the window and watched the busy street below, where everybody and everything seemed to quicken with anticipation of the coming season. So she fancied, at least.

"Does she think the Christmas-day, the dear Lord's day of birth, when the whole world should be glad, and when peace and good will should be in every heart, was only sent to bring cheer to the rich and the well and the strong? Does she think because I am only the governess of her children—only just a poor dependent upon her bounty—that I ask no part in the gladness of the blessed season which comes only once a year, and for which I and my little world have waited so long? Ah me! I have had plans, and they were made long before hers were dreamed of, and they were happy, happy plans, God knows. But she does not know, nor would she care even though she read my whole heart and its longings!"

The twilight gloom deepened and folded the girl in its soft embrace.

On the morrow that gloom would be merged into the dawn of a new day (one more step on toward the Christmas-tide), and finally the beautiful sunshine would drive away the last shadow, hide where it might, until the perfect day would stand revealed for the joy of mankind.

But in Margaret's heart—she thought to herself, while the tears rolled down her cheeks—the gloom would remain, still dark, still drear, and there would be no ray of sunshine to lighten it, nothing to cheer or lift her drooping spirits, though all earth stood out in joy and gladness beside.

She arose presently and lighted the gas, drew down

the shades at the windows, and set the room in order. Then she went to the hall, and listened a moment ere going down-stairs. Her eyes were swollen and showed tear-traces, she knew, and she did not wish to meet anybody.

But there was nobody there save Thomas, the footman, and he was gathering the letters from the hall table for the purpose of mailing them, when Margaret spoke—

"Thomas, there is a letter to my mother amongst those; will you kindly hand it to me?"

"And doan't ye want it sint, miss?" he asked, as he looked over the pile in his hand to find one addressed to Mrs. Arnold. "I have it, miss," he continued, going to meet her on the stairs, and noticing in a moment the whiteness of the pretty face and the stains of tears which it bore.

"I made a mistake in it," she said, smiling, as she thanked him and received her letter.

"Sure thin, Miss Maag'ret, it'll not be takin' yez a minit to c'rict it, an' I'll wait fer yez," replied the kind-hearted man of buttons, for he liked her well, and had his opinions as well as the others of the family.

"No, I thank you, Thomas," Margaret replied gratefully; "another mail will do. You would better make haste with your bag now."

Then she went to her room, and with flushed cheeks and rebellious heart opened the letter, and

after a lingering glance at its contents laid it upon the live coals in the grate before her.

"It burns, and is gone no more suddenly than the glad hopes and anticipations with which I wrote it only two short hours ago!" she muttered, half aloud; "and there is only the difference that paper does not feel, where hearts—oh, how a heart can suffer!" She lighted the gas, and sitting at the table wrote another letter, and when it was finished her eyes were dry and her heart more patient; for bitterly disappointed though she was, and sad as she knew her dear mother would be, yet the feeling that she was talking to that mother, and the knowledge of all the mother-heart would feel for her, and the patient, wise mother-lips would say to her, soothed and calmed the girl's perturbed spirit and did her good.

This is what she wrote:

"MY DARLING, MY PRECIOUS MOTHER:

"I had thought to be so happy with you at the coming Christmas time! My letter, telling you upon what day to expect me, was written, and would even now have been on its way to you. But, mother, we must give up our plans, our glad anticipations, dear; we must give them up, and I want you to help me imagine that everything is quite just and right, and altogether fair and square, because if you don't help me to that opinion I shall give way at last, and do or say something that may cost me my 'desirable posi-

tion' (as the world would view it), and so bring trouble on us both. Dear little mamsey, I am so utterly lonely and miserable to-night that I feel rebellious against—well, against what I might think was cruel fate, and only fate, if I didn't know that the dear Father holds the whole world in His hands, and knows the why and the wherefore of all happenings. A little while ago I was so happy that I fairly sang aloud for joy. In the midst of all that Mrs. Granger appeared and told me that I could not be spared, after all, to go home at the Christmas time, because her daughter—*her* daughter, mind you (your daughter is of commoner clay, you see)—is going to have company, and your daughter must take care of the children—who are not good with the nurse—and must play and help in the music, etc., etc., beside.

"Well, you and I will be disappointed after a year of longing and anticipation of a meeting at the Christmas season. Oh, I cannot bear it alone here! Write quickly and show me the bright side of the thing, if to such as you and I a bright side is to be found at all, and love your

"MARGARET."

When the letter was finished, sealed, and addressed, Margaret took it herself to the nearest letter-box, and turned her face homeward again with a weariness of movement which was caused more by the stone in her heart, and the heavy burden of disappointment there, than from any physical fatigue.

She would await the Christmas now in much the same state of mind as she usually awaited the Sundays of the week, when she could rest in mind and body, so far as the schoolroom was concerned, and turn her heart and thoughts to better things and better ways, if possible. But oh! she had been so full of hopes, and so glad with anticipations of rest and comfort in her own little home, far, far away from all these scenes and wearisome duties! If Mrs. Granger had only known, would she not have spared her the disappointment which would not only "spoil" the Christmas-tide for her (Margaret), but also for the dear, invalid mother who was waiting and watching in the little cottage home beyond city limits?

All this was in the girl's mind as she walked homeward through the gathering shades of the winter evening.

When she entered the hallway, the children were romping with their father, a kind-hearted man of business, who was more "at home" in his office than within the walls of his handsome house, and who knew as little of the children's governess as he did of her desires—or of her present disappointment. Perhaps, had he known of the latter, things would have been different in the end for all concerned.

Reaching her own room, Margaret sat down before the fire. The gas was turned low, everything was quiet. Harry and Effie, busy with their play, would not need attention from their governess, and their

little voices hardly mounted to the third-floor back room where Margaret could lock her door and feel herself safe in her own castle. Dinner would not be served for yet an hour more, and the girl had plenty of time for thoughts as fast and as many as might come to her.

She gathered up the threads of her life from the time of her young girlhood, when she first began to feel the joy of living and loving. The threads of gold—the sunny, glad days gone by—were crossed, it is true, with the darker skeins and tangles of life's shadows. The warp and the woof of life's great weaving were necessary to the manufacture of her character, she knew; but somehow the skeins had tangled, and the hard knots had formed, and one day to her heart there came a great grief which wounded it so that Time, great healer though he may be, had not even yet conquered the pain. The old wound opened at this twilight hour, as she sat in the firelight's glow, her head thrown back against the soft back of her easy-chair, and her brown eyes (from which now and then a tear escaped and lay glittering like a gem upon her cheek) closed to shut out from sight everything save the pictures which her memory called up before her mental vision.

The old wound! She shivered and moaned again just as she had shivered and moaned before, and would, she feared, as long as she lived to feel the hurt of it.

There had been many happy Christmas-tides for Margaret Arnold and her parents, but at last came one which proved happier than all before. Why? Because it brought to her a lover—of all lovers, she said to herself at that time, the most true, the most noble.

Howard Winthrop was only a bookkeeper in her father's employ, and with nothing save his salary to depend upon, but he had—at least it was so thought—a character which was worth the wealth of the Indies.

Mr. Arnold, who judged people by character rather than by their clothes, was quite willing to look at Howard through Margaret's eyes (allowing, of course, for certain "exaggerations" common to a girl very much in love, etc.), and only stipulated that the young people should wait a year or so, in order to know each other better, before becoming bound by a regular engagement.

So time passed, and the young man was a constant and welcome visitor at the house, and so far as appearances went seemed to be all that could be desired.

If friends wondered, now and then, that Margaret should have turned away from other and richer suitors (of whom, of course, she had had her share) to give preference to a young man in Howard's position, they took good care to keep their thoughts to themselves, and everything went well with the lovers until a year was nearly gone.

Then, one morning, when Margaret was feeling an unusual flow of good spirits, and was living over again in her heart the parting words of her lover, as on the evening before he had whispered them with his good-night, the postman brought the mail, and left behind him a sad shock for the girl who was so smiling and happy but a moment before. The maid handed her a letter addressed in the well-known handwriting which always brought blushes to Margaret's soft cheek.

But the lines enclosed within the envelope were not such as the girl had expected to read. They had evidently been put into the wrong envelope, and originally intended for the eyes of a chum who would appreciate them after a fashion of his own. There were a few commonplace words at first, just the ordinary beginning of a letter, and then followed these lines:

"Wait a while, Jack, my boy; the money will be mine in good time. No need to press me quite so soon for my debt, you know. Have patience, Jack; the money will come along, as I say, and the pretty girl thrown in to boot only makes it all the better for me. She isn't half bad, you see, and I'd as lief be married as not. I can steer my boat as well as any other fellow afloat, you may trust me. Keep dark about this, old man. Burn this letter at once, and just wait, that's all. Yours,

"H. WINTHROP."

Margaret had loved well and truly, but it would seem, alas! not wisely. And she stood like a statue, pale to the lips, and sick, oh! so sick at heart, after reading this letter. Then her high-spirited nature reasserted itself. Scorning deceit from the depths of her soul, her pride could not brook the insult of the lines she had read, and the pain and disappointment for the time being were forgotten in the sense of outraged pride.

She knew how it had chanced that her eyes were opened in time, and was thankful. Ah! how thankful she was that she had been able to learn in this way and now, before it would have been too late, the true character of the man to whom she had given the choice gift of her heart.

Howard had written two letters, one to her, the other to his friend (whoever that friend might be), and in the hurry of mailing had enclosed the wrong lines to her.

"It is well that he did so," she said to herself, and then with dry eyes and pale, set face she went straight to her father and laid the note before him. In less than an hour Howard Winthrop received a letter from Mr. Arnold (enclosing one from Margaret), in which the young man found himself dismissed both from the house and from his position with the firm. No explanations were vouchsafed by either the girl or her indignant father. Impulse ruled things with a high hand, and her indomitable pride kept poor

Margaret from a broken heart, though she quivered and moaned in secret for months after.

Several letters from Winthrop had been received at the Arnold house, but each one had been promptly returned unopened, and after a while it was learned that the young man was no longer to be seen in town, and seemed to have disappeared from the knowledge even of his old acquaintances and friends.

Then the son of a rich man offered himself to Margaret, and from a worldly standpoint the match would have been—so said the family friends—"a splendid one."

But Margaret sent him away for two reasons. First, and most important, she did not love him, and, indeed, her heart was too bruised and sore still to be easily healed by any wooer, whosoever he might be. Secondly, she knew him to be almost worthless in character, and she shrank from him with a feeling of disgust. Once before this young man had sought favor from her—long ago, when her heart had been full of "maiden meditation, fancy free." But her tact had prevented the "coming to the point" which she had so dreaded, and later, when Howard Winthrop had filled her thoughts and opened a new phase of life before her, the former would-be lover had retired, baffled, from the scene of action.

He was doomed, as we know, to the same fate again, and yet when it chanced that, a year later, Mr. Arnold failed in business, and fell from the

lofty social station he had held so long, to the humbler walks of life, this noble-minded young scion of a rich man who did not "fail" thanked his stars that he had not "fettered himself to the girl after all."

Mr. Arnold's failure in business was followed all too soon by his sickness and death, and the grief-stricken mother and daughter took themselves away from the scene of their former happiness and settled quietly in one of Connecticut's pretty villages. From there, in course of time, Margaret drifted on the tide of circumstances to her present position in Mr. Granger's family, and, as we have seen, was not particularly happy, though she tried to be cheerful and brave of heart, and—as the children were taught in their catechism each Sunday—"to do her duty in that state of life unto which it had pleased God to call her."

With the children she was content, for they loved her; and well for them that the lessons they learned from her were not altogether confined to those between covers of school-books. Her gentle, wise influence over their little loyal hearts and their pliable minds was of priceless value to them, and would one day bring forth fruit unknown to the worldly-minded parents and older sister.

Between that older sister and Margaret no very cordial feelings existed. The reasons were many and evident, though they were not known to Margaret, perhaps. Isabel was "the daughter of a very rich

man." Quoting that sentence, one felt that the sum and substance of the young lady's attractions had been given in full.

On the contrary, whatever the young person whose realms were the schoolroom and the nursery adorned herself with, one felt that the decorations were more graced by the wearer than *vice versa.* In her simple black gown, "rusty black" though it was by this time, the girl looked every inch a young queen, though her crown was only the golden wealth of soft hair twisted into the graceful knot at the back of her shapely head, and her gems the soft, true shine of her beautiful brown eyes. Had it not been for fear of annoyance from the children at the especial time alluded to, and for the greater convenience of her presence, Isabel would thankfully have seen Margaret depart for her own home.

"A girl in her position has no right to be so pretty!" she said to her mother, angrily; "and not for worlds would I have her show herself to my friends on Christmas evening. Men are such fools on the subject of a pretty face, and no doubt Mr. Berkley is as silly as the rest of his sex in that way."

Mr. Berkley, it should be explained, was a new addition to the circle of "society men about town," and being a sort of relative of a chum of Isabel's, had naturally seen Isabel quite frequently, and had won her liking by his courteous and pleasant manners as well as by his very attractive face. He was to escort

his cousin to the Granger party on Christmas night, and Isabel desired to look her best, for obvious reasons sacred to her own heart as yet.

On Christmas eve Nurse Bridget put her head in at the nursery door, where she saw Margaret, with a child at either side of her chair, telling them a story, while their little faces were radiant with satisfaction.

"Sure, Miss Maag'ret," said Bridget, "yez'll have to be afther puttin' the childer to bed the noight, for Mis' Granger's lettin' me g' out. It arerent me avenin', I know, but a gurrl must have her axtrys, ye see, an' I don't be gittin' as mony as most av us gurrls git, bad 'cess to harrud worruk!"

She didn't wait for Margaret's reply (though, to be sure, what reply had the governess to make?), but withdrew her auburn head and closed the door again.

Harry and Effie danced with pleasure.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the boy. "I thought we were having a be-yewtiful time enough, but it will be a hundred times beautifuller to have you put us to bed, 'stid of old red-head Bridget, you know!" And then he and Effie capered about the room in glee, while Margaret laid her head against the cushioned chair-back and watched them almost enviously.

"Dear little mites," she thought, "how like pretty butterflies they are! They know only that life is full of sunshine and flowers, and they have their

happy little day, ignorant of the fact that there are cruel thorns amongst the flowers, and that clouds are likely to put out the sunshine's glow. Ah, well! it is something to know that I am necessary to these little ones for love's sake only, and not for mere convenience. Their dear, loyal little hearts should help me remember that clouds do pass away sometimes, and that the sun is only waiting behind them. Mother, dear, patient mother! If I am disappointed, how much more is she suffering in that way; and yet she is brave, so brave, God bless her!"

The clock struck the children's bed-hour, and they ran, with laughing faces and outstretched arms, to climb into her lap and see who would get the first kiss. And soon after that they were ready for bed, and, kneeling at Margaret's knee, bowed little reverent heads and repeated in reverent, low tones the childish prayer she had taught them when she first entered the family.

Needless to say it had been a new experience to the children, whose mother, considering them "too young for such forms," had delayed her teaching until a more convenient season.

After the last good-night kisses had been exchanged, the lights were turned down, and Margaret left the room, but not before she had heard Harry inform his sister, in the loudest of confidential whispers, that "Miss Marg'ret was the very bestest and sweetest lady in the world, and a hundred million

times prettier'n sis' Isabel, and he loved her big heaps better'n Isabel, too!"

She smiled as she heard the complimentary words, and decided that they would make a pleasant item in the letter she was going to write to her mother presently.

"Mamma shall at least have a letter for my

Christmas greeting to-morrow," she had said to herself; and she knew that Thomas would take it to the letter-box for her if she could get it ready for the night mail.

So presently she had drawn her table beneath the light from the gas-bracket at the side of the room, and prepared for a long and loving talk with the dear one so many miles away on that Christmas eve,

which they had planned so hopefully to spend together.

"My own mother," she wrote—and then came a tap at her door. "Miss Isabel says she wants you, miss," said a maid, "an' will you please come down right away?"

Margaret closed her portfolio, shut her lips tightly, and forced back the protest of her heart, though the quick tears of some indescribable feelings sprang to her eyes.

"You was writing, miss? Too bad for you to be interrupted, so it is," said the maid, with sympathy.

"Oh, it's of no consequence," was Margaret's reply; "nothing is of any consequence, in fact. Tell Miss Isabel I will be down presently."

She spoke bitterly, for she couldn't help it, and she was human enough to purposely delay obeying Isabel's call until it suited her convenience to go down.

"What right has she to interfere with my spare time?" thought Margaret. "I am not her maid; I am the governess, and I have a right to my short evenings. Now my letter will lose the mail, and my mother will suffer another disappointment. It is unjust, cruel; and if my lane has a turning, when —when will the turn come into view?"

She found Miss Granger and her "most intimate" together in the former's handsomely furnished room. Something had "gone wrong" with the rich lace

overskirt of Isabel's dress. The maid was "stupid," the dressmaker too far away to be conveniently reached then. Isabel, knowing that the children's governess was quick, clever, and dainty in taste, had to put pride in her pocket, and borrow of Margaret those necessary qualities which were lacking in herself; and therefore was Margaret prevented from writing to her mother, or from having her hard-earned time of rest in her quiet room above.

She knelt on the floor at Isabel's side and silently proceeded to make the necessary alterations, while Isabel and her friend chatted on various subjects of dress and fashion, the coming party, and the men and women invited.

"Do be careful how you handle that lace, Miss Arnold," said Isabel, presently; "you cannot handle such delicate texture as you would—your own gowns, you know." Margaret's face crimsoned, but as she knew the reproof was quite undeserved, and as, moreover, she had handled and worn, in the days past, laces quite as rich and delicate as that before her now, she dared not trust herself to reply, lest the indignation burning within her should explode disastrously. So she went on with her work, and Isabel continued her conversation with her friend. "I'm so glad Mr. Berkley is to be here," she said. "Do you know, he acts as if he were ready to—to—well" —with a giggle, and uplifting of the eyebrows— "to be more intimate still, you know."

"Why, Isabel Granger!" was the reply, given with that charming candor privileged by intimacy, but none the less savoring of spitefulness. "I don't think he has really shown a bit more interest in you than he has in any one else, and I'm sure, he —he"—another little giggle—"he has been quite devoted to me, so people have said."

"Oh, pshaw! Now, Maud, you know well enough that your great failing is to jump at conclusions of just that sort. Anybody with half an eye could see that Mr. Berkley likes me, and you know he is related in some way to Kate, and he has been here with her many an evening, when he might have gone to see you if he had preferred to.—There! Thank you, Miss Arnold; that is much better. You really have quite good taste about some things, after all," stepping back from the glass and turning her head to see the hang of her skirt behind. "When I'm married, I presume I shall travel abroad a great deal. Mr. Berkley has a decided liking for foreign countries and cities. I——"

"Aren't you a little ahead of yourself, Belle?" interrupted her friend, laughingly. "You haven't yet had a proposal from the gentleman in question, and I think I'd wait for that, if I were you, before starting off on a wedding tour."

"Jealous, aren't you, Maud? Never mind! So would I be if I were in your place, no doubt.—You may go now, Miss Arnold," turning to Margaret, who

had already grown sick with all her poor ears had been listening to.

She thankfully left the room and ascended to her own once more, but it was too late for her to get her letter off in time for the mail train which would have carried the loving lines to the little village home for the Christmas morning delivery; and what with the conflicting feelings of anger and disappointment and disgust, the poor girl gave way at last and cried her heart free from all but its own weariness, and was glad to get into bed and forget everything disagreeable, if it were possible, in sleep.

As soon as she had left the room below, Miss Maud had sweetly remarked: "You may thank your stars, Isabel Granger, that your governess will not be on exhibition to-morrow evening when Mr. Berkley is present. I tell you plainly that neither you nor I would contrast favorably with her in the matter of looks. I never saw such a perfect face; and those eyes of hers are simply angelic!"

"That creature puts on airs enough to fly away in the breezes," retorted Isabel, angrily. "One would think her a born duchess to see her manners at times. Mamma ought to send her away. I do get so provoked!" Miss Maud shrugged her shoulders and smiled in a way that was aggravating to Isabel, but ere she had time to answer, her mother entered the room, and the topic of conversation took another form.

The grand Christmas dinner was over at last. It had been the more enjoyable because Margaret—though Mrs. Granger, to do her justice, had expected her governess to share the dinner with the family at table—had requested that she might dine with the children in the nursery; and, consequently, Isabel had felt no twinges of jealousy to mar her appetite (a very healthy one usually) or cause a wrinkle upon her well-powdered brow.

In the evening, as the expected guests came in, the sounds of merriment grew louder, and climbed to the top of the house to mock at poor, sad Margaret, who had somehow allowed her thoughts to travel backward a year or so, and wake up the dear old times when *she* was so happy, too, that her laughter rang out as clearly and merrily as that to which she now listened.

She dreaded the minutes as they flew by, not knowing when she might be summoned to sing or play for the company. And so indeed she was, at last, and was more than grateful for the envious manœuvre of Isabel's which had placed a screen between the piano and the rooms which held the guests.

"It is so much more effective," she remarked amiably to Mr. Berkley—and several others, who wondered at the proceeding—"don't you think, to have the music placed like an unseen orchestra, to have the harmony mysteriously, as it were, floating out from no visible source?"

And so she had unintentionally done a real service to Margaret, while, at the same time, making sure that none of the governess's charms should captivate the eyes of her gentlemen guests, at least. She was not so troubled about the matter so far as her own sex was concerned.

Had Isabel known Mr. Berkley's private opinion of her, and others like her among the young ladies whom he had met since his advent into New York society, maybe she would not have felt in such complacent mood that evening.

Truth to tell, he had such peculiar views of his own in regard to young women, and true womanhood of character, that Isabel and her "set" were far below his standard. He could laugh and chat and play the agreeable, certainly, since society demanded such shallowness of conduct where the slaves of society met together and enjoyed their bondage.

But his heart was not in it, and therefore it was that while Margaret's pure, sweet voice made itself a welcome place in the midst of the Christmas cheer that evening, Berkley's ears were more mindful of the song and the voice (though the singer was invisible) than of the incessant chatter poured into his brain from the lips of the overdressed Miss Granger, who persistently held her place at his side, and ran no risks of his approaching her "dear friend Maud."

"Such a sweet voice!" he finally found a chance

to remark. "But there seems to be an undertone of sadness in it, too."

"Yes?" carelessly replied his listener. "It is only the children's governess. It pleases her so much to be asked to sing, mamma gave her the opportunity to-night. Poor thing! her voice is almost her only redeeming feature. She is quite commonplace and plain-looking. It seems too bad!"

"Aha!" thought quick-witted Berkley, who refused to be humbugged so readily as Isabel had imagined. "A case of envy, I am sure. No doubt the governess is pretty and well-bred, and a trifle superior to my lady in many ways!"

But whatever he thought, his face betrayed nothing, and if he heartily wished the evening over, even while offering his arm to Isabel for the dance then about to form, no hint of it was allowed to enter into his charming courtesy of manner.

The children had been allowed to sit up far beyond their usual hour, but as soon as Margaret had slipped out of the side door and gone again to her room, Mrs. Granger called her little ones (smiling proudly at their attractive appearance, and delighted with the compliments they had received from her guests), and bade them "say good-night to the company, like darlings, and run away to bed."

"I'm going to get a flower for my precious Miss Marg'ret first," exclaimed Harry.

Mr. Berkley stood near by, and when Harry re-

turned from the conservatory with an exquisite rose in his hand, that gentleman playfully caught him and asked that it be given to him instead. The child struggled to free himself, laughing, and holding his rose above his curly head.

"And who is Miss Margaret?" asked Berkley, smiling.

"Oh, she's the lady who teaches us lessons, and she's just the prettiest lady you ever saw. Isn't she, mamma?" turning to his mother and innocently thinking to have his assertion verified. "Isn't she a beautiful lady?"

"The children's governess," said Mrs. Granger carelessly to the gentleman, and hardly liking the laugh in his eyes. He was, of a truth, a little triumphant at the correctness with which he had read the daughter's envy only a little before.

"She must be indeed all that her voice betrayed her to be—good and true and very sweet," remarked Mr. Berkley, as the children kissed the mother and ran away, "if she has won the love of the little folks so completely. I noticed that Harry called her 'precious.'"

"Children take strange fancies, Mr. Berkley, you know. But come, let me introduce you to one of our society belles; she has just entered the room, I see," said the lady, moving on.

Fortunately, as things turned out, the introduction

could not then take place, as a gentleman preceding Mrs. Granger and Mr. Berkley whirled the young belle off in the mazes of a waltz. Mrs. Granger seated herself with some friends, and Mr. Berkley turned to the broad hallway, where it was less warm and crowded than in the parlors. He stood at the doorway looking in upon the dancers, and was thinking of hunting up the young lady to whom he was distantly related in a cousinly way (but whom he had not known so very long, after all, owing to circumstances), and finding out how the chances were for getting home.

Just then a little pull on his coat caused him to turn around, and he was only in time to see a pair of little legs disappear behind the turn of the broad staircase at the further end of the hall. As the legs disappeared, a curly head popped out from the hiding-place, and a little fat finger beckoned to Berkley, and then laid itself against a rosy lip.

Berkley understood the sign of caution, and tiptoed softly in the direction of the finger.

Once near enough, and quite unobserved by the few who happened to be standing with faces turned parlorward just then, little Harry pulled his grown-up friend under the shelter of the staircase and whispered in his ear : "Say, mamma and Isabel never seem to b'lieve me when I tell 'em my dear Miss Marg'ret's awful pretty, but she truly is, I tell you, and if you don't b'lieve me either, you just come 'long

and see for your own self. She's in there," pointing to the library beyond, on the further side of the square hall. "She came down to get a book to read to Effie and me, and when I saw you standing there I just thought I'd show you that mamma and Isabel don't know half how sweet Miss Marg'ret is, so now!"

Mr. Berkley laughed, and held out his hand to Harry. "Come on, then; I'll take just one peep, but it won't be very polite, little man, you know. I guess I'll just wait here after all, and you can introduce us when she comes out. That'll be better."

But the boy looked disappointed. "She won't wait to be interduced," he whispered excitedly; "she's awful bashful 'bout strangers. You come on into the lib'ry, and I'll show her to you. Come, do come!"

Mr. Berkley hesitated, but his desire to have a glimpse of the face of the owner of that sweet voice was so strong that he yielded himself to the child's efforts, and was presently drawn into the library, where the lights were softly shaded, and the glow of a grate fire pervaded the apartment in refreshing contrast to the feverish glare and blaze of the large parlors beyond.

Margaret stood at the open door of the bookcase, turning the leaves of the book in her hand. The pure, perfect profile of her face was all that the gentleman could see, and with a quick pressure of the

little hand in his, he stooped and whispered to Harry: "Speak to her, dear!"

The child ran across the room, and Margaret looked up from her book with startled eyes.

"What brought you down, dearie? Is anything wrong with Effie? I was going up right away."

"Oh, Miss Marg'ret, there's such a nice gentleman! I like him so much, and I want to interduce him, you see. He is Mr. Berkley, and he's very good and kind."

Before the girl had a chance to reply, Berkley advanced. She met his gaze. Then—

"Run up to Effie, Harry, and I will follow you," she said.

"But I want—" began the boy eagerly.

"My darling," she interrupted, "I know this gentleman already. You need not wait; go at once."

The little fellow, used to obeying his governess, went at once out of the room, but his face showed dislike of the command and bewilderment at the state of affairs.

Then Berkley held out his hand, and his honest blue eyes never faltered before Margaret's stern gaze.

"You here?" she said. "And under another name, too! Is it your habit to take different names with different friends?"

"Margaret, it is three years since we met last. In all of those three years, as the dear Lord hears me, I speak truth when I say that I have never ceased to

love you," he replied, withdrawing the hand which hers had refused to meet, and standing proudly before her. His eyes—those eyes she had loved so dearly to look into—met the steadfast, cool glance of her brown eyes without the shadow of guilt or fear, and she did silent battle with her heart the while.

"Love me?" she replied, presently. "But the money—the money you loved better than myself—would not have availed you long, Howard Winthrop, even had I not learned your true worth through the note you sent by mistake to the girl you were making a dupe of, and who was to be 'thrown in' with the bargain. Oh, you see my memory is good still! I have not forgotten that note, though you did not intend it for my eyes, it is true."

He drew his hand confusedly across his forehead.

"Money? Note? I don't understand. Mar—Miss Arnold, what do you mean? What do you hint at when you speak of being duped?"

She turned haughtily away. "It is late, and my duties call me upstairs, Mr. Winthrop (or Mr. Berkley, whichever name suits your present convenience). I will bid you good-evening and good-by."

He put out his hand once more, and the sad face he turned to her almost unnerved the girl, in whose heart the old love was yet too much alive, alas! But she had been duped once, when he had looked at her with the same expression in his blue eyes as now, and she would not put herself again in danger.

Oh, no! The very fact of his having another name betrayed the character of the man, and she would never meet him again.

"Before you go," said he, "let me in justice to myself say a few words, and then I shall have done all I can do to set right a wrong which you credit to me, but of which I am ignorant. I never wrote a note to anybody, friend or foe, concerning your father's money or yourself in connection with it. I never gave your wealth a thought. Had you been without a cent in the world, and had you given me the privilege of working for your comfort, I should have been glad and proud to toil day and night for you. Whatever note was, as you say, delivered to you by mistake, and which, by your manner and words now, must have wounded both your pride and your feelings—I give you my word, on the honor of a gentleman and a man, that I had no knowledge of it; nor, indeed, have I ever known why I was dismissed both from your father's favor and your own. You sent me a cruel, unjust note, which I did not understand. I wrote asking explanations, and for answer my letters came back unopened. At last I left this country and lived abroad. There I went into business with a man who learned to love me as a son. His name was Berkley. He was like a father to me, and at last, when he begged me to take his name, and with it the fortune he wanted to leave me, I consented to the first desire because, as you

know, I was alone in the world, with no relatives to care what I did or where I went, and the one woman to whom I had given my heart had turned me adrift (as women do when they tire of us, all the world knows). So I took his name, and I accepted the fortune his will provided for me, with an earnest intention to use it wisely, and with gratitude for all its opportunities. I have made inquiries about you from time to time, although I should not have intruded myself upon you, even had I known where to find you. I am as proud as you, Margaret Arnold, and I had suffered keenly at what seemed most unjust and uncalled-for treatment at your hands, to say nothing of my letters having been flung back at me, unread by you. Had I known it was Margaret Arnold to whom little Harry was bringing me, I should not have come here. Something in your singing this evening thrilled me unaccountably, and I longed to see the singer, but didn't dream she was yourself. I left you in the midst of wealth and comfort; I find you here a dependent in a house where you should be upon equal terms with its people. You wear the symbol of mourning. Margaret, tell me, is it for both your parents you are in grief, or is one still spared to you? You know well that my sympathy is wholly sincere, whatever has befallen you."

The girl had long ere this covered her face with her hands, and now, as she leaned against the wall,

the tears were glistening upon her cheeks and could not be longer concealed.

Howard took a few steps toward her, stopped irresolutely, and then advanced with a determination to learn now, while he had the chance which might never come again, what fault or crime of his had brought about the separation between herself and him.

Very gently he withdrew her hands from the tear-stained face, and met her sad gaze with one equally sad.

"I am detaining you," he said, "and some one may enter here at any moment. But I beseech you, before we part forever, tell me, for the sake of justice, what I did to forfeit the esteem of yourself and your father? Tell me only that, Margaret, and I will not question further."

Never had she seemed so dear, so sweet to the man before her, as now, in her poor, rusty black gown, with the signs of her servitude written all about her, and the tears lying upon her cheeks and glistening upon her lashes. And yet he dared not obey the impulse to gather her close in his arms.

"Speak, Margaret, I beg of you!" he said again, for no word came from her trembling lips. But she said at last, glancing fearfully at the door, lest any one should be near:

"There has been a mistake, a terrible mistake! If all you say is true—and oh, I believe you, Howard,

it is true !—then you have suffered most unjustly, and I—I have been to blame. But oh ! how could I know that it was not as—as it seemed to be ? Listen, and tell me if I had no reason to doubt you."

Then she told him all, and his heart released her from the blame she would have taken wholly upon herself.

"Can't you see," he asked her, "that the clever forgery of my handwriting was done by the scoundrel whom you had rejected before you knew me ? Can't you understand that he bided his time, and waited until he could in some way obtain a copy of my writing—though how and where he did it I cannot imagine—and then had his revenge upon us both, and killed our happiness because he had no share in it ?"

Margaret nodded sadly.

"And you—oh, Margaret, if you had only opened at least one of my notes afterward, all this would have been spared us. Don't you see now that it would ?"

She held out both hands to him, and, smiling through tears, "Will you come back to me again, Howard ?" she asked.

"Oh ! Margaret, may I, dear?" was the reply. And then he waited no longer, but put his strong arms about her, as though defying all future circumstances to separate them again ; and while his cheek rested against the soft brown hair of her bowed head, he

whispered, touching a fold of the black dress: "Which one has left us, dear?"

"Father," she answered. "And surely he has learned long ago that it has been all a mistake between you and me. If I thought he did not know, oh! my love, I should be so unhappy, and reproach myself even more than I now do."

"We will go at once to your mother, darling," said he, "and then we will take her abroad where she will grow strong and well again. Hark! some one is coming."

She slipped from his arms and glanced at the clock. "It is almost half an hour since Harry left us," she whispered, "and what will he think of my promise to him? I must go upstairs at once. But"—she gave him a sweet, enchanting smile as she turned toward the door—"it will be so good to rest again with my loved ones, dear. Believe me, I long for it!"

When she had gone noiselessly up the back staircase, and Howard Winthrop—or Berkley, as we must call him still—had lingered in the shadowy library yet a little longer, to realize, as well as he could, the great happiness which had come so unexpectedly to him, he returned to the parlors, where the lights were still flashing, and the buzz of conversation and rhythm of the dance were still in progress.

Fortunately for him, the young lady whom he had escorted was ready to leave, and soon afterward Howard left her at her own door. Before he slept

PUT HIS STRONG ARMS ABOUT HER.

that night he wrote a full and long letter to Margaret, and then lay down to dream of her all night. It is quite probable that they met and walked together in the sweet land of dreams, for the girl's face in the morning was radiant with a new light; and if she had been, as Harry had described it, "be-yewtiful" before, she certainly was, to borrow his phrase again, "beautifuller" still on the morning after the Christmas party. And if she had loved Harry before, she certainly loved him more devotedly than ever now, if one could judge by the caresses she gave him—the reason for which, only the library walls could have betrayed, had they been endowed with speech.

A few days later Margaret resigned her position (much to the delight of Isabel) and returned home. Mrs. Granger, anxious to please Isabel, had not demurred at the girl's departure, although she had wondered why Margaret seemed so glad to go from a good home and fair salary.

On the afternoon of the same day Mr. Berkley was announced, and received by mother and daughter most graciously.

"I am about to go abroad," said Berkley, smiling, "and have called to make my adieux, and to tell you what a delightful memory of your party the other evening I shall carry about with me." Mrs. Granger beamed upon him, but Isabel, who had been seized with a mental chill when he spoke of going abroad,

was not quite able to smile yet, as Berkley observed out of the corners of his eyes.

"Do you travel alone, Mr. Berkley?" questioned Mrs. Granger.

"Oh, no, indeed"—briskly. "My wife goes with me, and her mother also." Isabel shivered visibly and compressed her thin lips till her mouth resembled a mere slit in her face.

"Ah! indeed"—from Mrs. Granger, stiffly. ("The thermometer is falling," thought Howard, with a silent chuckle.)

"I did not know you were married"—from Isabel, weakly, and with an effort at a giggle.

"I'm not yet, but expect to be to-morrow," said Berkley. Isabel thought of her friend Maud. Could it be possible that Maud had actually outwitted her, after all?

Mrs. Granger sat erect in her chair, as if waiting further developments, and so Berkley continued pleasantly:

"I have been engaged some time, and think, now that I am in possession of quite a fortune, it is time to settle down with the dearest of little wives, who is also the prettiest of pretty women—'present company always excepted,'" with a bow to the ladies.

"And may we ask the name of this fortunate woman?" asked Mrs. Granger, with an attempt at playfulness.

"Certainly, though you know her well already.

She is none other than Miss Margaret Arnold, recently governess in your family. I'm sure you will congratulate me, as you have learned her attractive qualities so well!"

He smiled blandly upon his hostesses, and arose to say farewell to them.

Isabel was not present when he turned to bid her adieu with the same formal hand-shake which had passed between the older lady and himself. However, her disappearance was not remarked upon by Howard, and presently he was walking along the street, laughing merrily to himself, and yet pitying the poor, envious creature who had not appreciated his beautiful Margaret, and who was now yet more envious of her than before.

"The miserable, designing girl!" was Isabel's remark when her mother found her walking her room angrily.

"My dear," was the reply, "if you have been disappointed, there is no necessity for letting the world know it. Smile and be cheerful, and—bait another hook."

When Margaret's wedding cards were brought to the Granger household a day or so later, Isabel tossed them immediately into the fire. Her friend Maud, chancing to be present, remarked somewhat carelessly, as she watched the burning of the bits of pasteboard:

"Wedding trips to Europe, before proposals from the—er—party supposed to conduct the affair, are not as successful as is sometimes imagined, are they, Isabel, dear? We know of a case, I believe, do we not, where the——"

"Maud, don't talk like an idiot!" from Isabel.

"Certainly not, dear," replied Maud; "but I do hope that Mr. and Mrs. Berkley will enjoy their wedding trip, though I suppose she hadn't planned such a thing, of——"

"Maud," again interrupted Isabel, "I wish you would hush up! It's perfect nonsense! I never cared a snap of my finger for that fellow, and I wondered how you could. I should feel as though I had been regularly jilted if he had been as frequent a visitor at my house as he was at yours."

"How 'circumstances do alter cases,'" drawled Maud, as she stood up to adjust her hat. "Well, I must go, my dear. Have you any new plans for a trip abroad? Let me know when."

MOTHER'S VISIT.

AT last mother had a letter from the city. Neighbor Jones had "fetched it along" as he was returning from the post-office. The dear soul in cotton gown and gingham apron made haste to wipe the flour of her bread-making from her hands, and for the first moment since breakfast took time to sit down and rest, while reading the long-looked-for letter from the married city daughter.

Father came in from the barn as she was opening her letter, and she lifted a beaming face to him.

"A letter from Marier, father! Seems a long spell since she writ before, don't it? I was a-gittin' kinder worrited les' she was sick or somethin'."

He seated himself beside her, with pleased expectation all over his face, and gazed, as did she, with great admiration (as they never failed to upon receipt of those city letters) at the clear, well-formed characters of Maria's handwriting.

"Dear Mother," ran the letter, "you must excuse the long delay in my letter, but really I do have so much to accomplish from day to day, and so many engagements on my mind, that I get very little chance for home letters, and you must remember that

'no news is good news,' you know. If I were sick, of course Mr. Munibag would let you hear at once about it, and you should understand how much more busy one's days are in the city than in the quiet country."

Father crossed one knee over the other as mother read this, and said with a half laugh:

"'Pears to me, mother, you 'n' me's 'bout as busy as folks can well be, if we do live in the country. Go on."

"Mr. Munibag likes to have me entertain a great deal, and then there is a constant round of calls, you know, and all that kind of thing, and so if you don't hear from me very often, you and father must not think anything of it, but remember only that I am very busy and would write oftener if I had the time.

"Now I must say good-by, because some callers are waiting for me down-stairs. I would like to have a visit from you when you think you can come for a few days. John and I will try to make you enjoy yourself, of course. You can send me a line, and we will meet you any time. Good-by, with love to father and you,

"From your daughter,

"MARIA."

Mother put the letter back in the envelope and looked at father inquiringly. He returned the gaze with affectionate eyes, but there was a peculiar smile about his mouth that mother wondered at.

AT LAST MOTHER HAD A LETTER FROM THE CITY.

"Well," said she, "I s'pose you'll hate to spare me, father, but I'd like real well to go an' visit Marier. It's real good of her to want me. I s'pose she's lonesome-like for her mother, an' is clean beat out bein' so busy with them fine friends o' Mr. Munibag's. She was always so obligin', you know, Marier was, that I s'pose she's havin' all that comp'ny an' doin' more than she really wants to, jest to oblige him. Poor gal! I don't s'pose we'd oughter ask her to write any more frequent to us!"

"Marier's a pretty gal—there ain't no prettier, I'll be bound, in the hull of York than our Marier," said father; "an' I s'pose, bein's you're all the ma she's ever hed—I don't count her ma-in-law to be to her what *you* be, of course—it's kind of nat'rel she should hanker to see ye, seein's she ain't see ye, nor me nuther, for that matter, for quite a long spell o' time." He shifted his position, and crossing his other knee, tapped meditatively with his horny finger-nails against the arm of his chair.

"Well, what do you reckon I'd best do, father? It'll be jest as you say. I ain't been away from home—well, there, I don't know when, an' then 'twas only to Hartford, you know."

"Ye want to go, don't ye, mother?"

"Well, yes, father; I do feel to go, if you don't mind bein' alone, you an' the boy. I s'pose you could make out to git your own vittles for a week, couldn't ye?"

Father laughed.

"Well, I did pretty well when you was sick them days with newrolagy, didn't I, mother? An' Nathan —well, if he is a boy, he's got more sense into his twelve-year-old head than some men I've see, round about."

"Yes, I've always felt we did a good thing a-takin' of that boy from the town farm. He's been a good boy, an' rewarded us faithful. Well, then, father, I s'pose I can write Marier I'll go. Let me see—this is Monday; s'pose I set next Thursday?"

"That'll suit me, mother, an' I hope you'll have a right good time with our gal. Some day I'll take my turn an' go down for a visit with her."

He returned to the barn, and mother went back to her work, rested and refreshed after the news from her daughter, and feeling a flutter of expectation at her heart as delightful as it was new.

Meanwhile, father, sawing wood in the old shed outside, was thinking away busily, as follows:

"I didn't exactely like the sort of hurry in that there letter of Marier's. 'Pears to me she's more took up with them fine doin's o' hern than mother seems to sense. I ain't never been sure we did right to send the gal to that boardin'-school for so long a spell; she ain't seemed to love her old home as much since she l'arnt them airs an' styles an' sich! 'N' I'd never let her gone to York to visit that city schoolmate, nuther, if I'd s'posed she was goin' to fall in

love with the gal's brother. Well, I dunno; it's too late to fret over that now, for it ain't tarned out bad for our gal, noway, an' we'd oughter be happy so long as she is; only—somehow, she—well, she's been gittin' so sorter weaned away from the old things, an' it feels as if she was kinder hurryin' to git through with her letters 'fore she's scarce begun 'em. An' it's terrible onsatisfyin'—to me, though mother, she won't allow no sech idee herself. Ah, well, mother 'n' me's only a couple of old fogies, an' Marier, she belongs to the new fogies; an' she ain't to blame, I s'pose!"

. . . . . .

"Ye've got all your duds, sure, mother?" asked the old man, as he stood on the platform beside the train which was to carry his good wife off to new scenes for a week.

Mother's head was poked out of the window of her car, and her honest, affectionate eyes regarded Silas with a sort of lingering regret, albeit they sparkled with the joyousness of her anticipations.

"Got every one of 'em, father," she replied. She reached her gloved hand out of the window, and father grasped it in his, heedless of the crowd about.

"You be sure to shet the winder nearest your bed, father," exclaimed she (and a titter went through the car as her anxious and loud tones reached everybody's ears), "for I sha'n't feel comfortable if I think

you're ketchin' another spell of the grip! An', oh! don't let Nathan forgit to give that sick pig her medicine; an' tell him to look out for the settin' hens;

AT THE CAR WINDOW.

an', father, now don't you go an' stint yourself in your vittles!"

"Yes, mother; I'll tell him; don't you worry

'bout us," said father, grasping her hand more closely and walking along beside the car as it slowly started on the rails. At the last moment, when it was impossible for the two old hands to hold together longer, they parted, and mother leaned back in the car seat with an air of innocent importance, and a smile of large-hearted benevolence on her kind, motherly face, which amused her fellow-passengers.

"They've no idee that I'm goin' to visit my married darter at York city!" thought she. "I don't s'pose half of 'em hev got rich city darters to visit an' be welcome to; leastwise, if they hev, I don't s'pose any one of 'em can hold a taller-candle to my Marier!"

Then her thoughts pictured the meeting between that daughter (whom she had not seen for a long, long time) and herself. How glad and happy Maria would be (she was sure) to see her dear old mother again; and what a good time she would have there, as the honored guest in the family! When she had last seen Maria, the little girl Ethie was six years old; and how she had liked to follow grandma around, and go about the farm with grandpa! That was—why, it was three years ago! Only think how long! But then Maria had been travelling considerably, and going to distant watering-places in the summers, and altogether there hadn't been much chance for a visit at the old farm during the three years. Mother went on in her thoughts something after

this sort, and mixing up in a happy sort of way her memories and her anticipations, until, before she knew how time had passed, she was almost half way on her journey.

The rest of the time passed rather wearily to the dear soul, so unused to journeying, and she grew very tired at last.

But the long day was drawing to its close, and presently the train bustled in under the arched roof of the depot, and mother, on the arm of a kind man who, noticing her perplexed, troubled face, offered to assist her through the crowd, was escorted safely to the end of the station and delivered to her waiting son-in-law, who had just come in, and by whom she was welcomed with a patronizing cordiality which has several meanings of its own.

But how she beamed upon him, and how she trembled with the pleasure so near her—the sight of her only daughter, the fine city daughter, of whom she and father were so proud ; the girl who was all in all to them, and of whom they had not a thought except of love and prayer !

Happy mother, hastening nearer and nearer, with every turn of the carriage wheels, to that waiting daughter and the little grandchild of whom she had such indulgent and tender memories !

Father, after watching the train out of sight, through a mist in his old eyes which sadly blurred

his vision, turned, at last, sadly away from the little country station, and pointed Dolly's head for home.

"Well, mother's gone, Dolly," he said, trying to speak bravely, yet feeling a sudden sense of loneliness which nearly overpowered him. "Mother's gone, an' it's goin' to be pretty pesky lonesome business for us to home, old horse!"

He transferred the reins to the other hand, and reached to the pocket in his coat-tails for a handkerchief. With this he blew a loud trumpet-note from his poor old nose, and tried to think his eyes didn't need wiping (but they did); and then the sympathetic Dolly turned her head to him with an inquiring gaze in her mild eyes, and he said again:

"Yes, mother's gone! I hope she'll have a nice time! I hope she will, but" —he scratched his head and drew his bushy brows together—"mother, she ain't used to city ways, an' I'm sorter feard she's goin' to feel a bit strange there, if she be to Marier's house!"

For a while he drove slowly over the road; for, to tell the truth, the old fellow dreaded to get back to the house which was now so empty of mother's presence.

But there were chores waiting him, and there was no use in dallying, since if he delayed until evening the emptiness would still be there.

So he touched Dolly up, and presently they were at home again.

Nathan crossed the yard with a hatful of eggs warm from the nest.

"Well, mother's gone, Nat, my boy," said father, once more, looking at the eggs wistfully. "Lor', how mother'd liked them aigs; seems to me I ain't seen none look so white an' big, I dunno when. Most a pity ye hadn't found 'em 'fore mother went away."

"They warn't laid, sir," said Nathan, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Sure enough, Nat, sure enough." He sat wearily down on the doorstep, keeping his back turned to the room where mother was usually seen, cheerful and busy with work. "Seems 's if mother's goin' has kinder upsot my wits!" He pulled out the handkerchief again, and a second trumpet-blast resounded through space.

Nat eyed his master keenly, and went off with Dolly to the barn.

"The boss is missin' of missis, that's what's ailin' him," he said to himself. "An' I shouldn't wonder if I'd be ailin' same way 'fore night."

And so it was, indeed! Two more lonely beings than were sheltered by the roof of the old farmhouse that night could not have been found the whole village over.

Five days later, as father and Nathan were working in a back meadow, the village stage-driver hailed

them from the stage-box, and they approached in answer to his beckoning finger.

"Say, your wife's home, Silas!"

Father started excitedly. "No, she ain't now, be she?"

"Yas; I jest left her an' her duds at your door. Wasn't expectin' of her, eh?"

"Well, I kinder s'posed she'd send word, but mother's been plannin' a surprise for us," was the answer, for Silas wasn't going to let his sudden suspicions be known or guessed at by any outsider. There was some good reason for mother's sudden return, and he feared she had been troubled in some way; but it was mother's and his secret, if 'twas so, and nobody should laugh about it behind her back.

He dropped his smile as soon as Jake had driven on, and turning to Nathan, he said:

"Stay right to work, Nat, an' I'll go home an' help mother git her duds in. She's give us a fust-rate surprise, ain't she, boy?"

He hurried as fast as he could across the fields which lay between him and the house, and it seemed to him that they never had taken so long to cross before.

Mother, poor, tired soul! was sitting on the bench beside the door of the little porch when father came panting and puffing up the garden path.

"Oh, father!" she said, when she saw his dear, anxious face; and then she put her head on his shoulder and cried softly.

"Mother! Why, what ails ye, dear heart?" he asked, half frightened at her tears, which were an unusual sight for him. "I knowed there'd been somethin' wrong with ye when I heard ye was back. Jake told me as he driv past, that you'd come. Well, well, well, mother"—drawing back and taking an affectionate look at her—"if it ain't good for weak eyes to see you a-settin' there so nat'rel ag'in, now I tell ye!"

She wiped her poor old eyes, and laughed as well as she could with a lump in her throat and a weight on her heart.

"Well, you see, father, I was gittin' so dreadful sort of lonely, an' there seemed to be a feelin' in me to git back here to home as quick as I could, an' so—so I jest came along; that's all!"

Father looked at her steadily.

"Mother, it *ain't* all. You've been worrited over somethin' else but lonesomeness, an' I ain't goin' to be fooled. You jest out with the hull story."

"Lor', father, 'twarn't much when I come to think on it, you see. 'Twas jest this way. Marier, she was glad to see me, an' kissed me, an' took me up to my room, an'——"

"Where was your room, mother? The best in the house, warn't it?—seein' as you was Marier's own dear mother."

"Well, now don't go to git riled, father. Marier, she hed to give me the 'fourth story back,' as they

called it, 'cause you see the other rooms was all fixed up for comp'ny, an'—well, I could see that 'twarn't wuth while wastin' sech finery on only me. Oh, I didn't mind the room; an', as Marier said—she's a thoughtful gal, you know, father—I'd be more out of the way of noise an' disturbance an' sech, from the folks comin' an' goin', an' Ethie's playin', an' all that kind o' thing. Marier thought I'd kinder like bein' quiet to myself most of the day, so she didn't bother me to go out an' see the sights, she said, as she would 'a' done if I'd been younger in my years. Oh, I guess Marier meant to be very keerful of me, father, an' I don't s'pose she knowed I was kinder hankerin' to hear some cheerful noises now an' then, that it would 'a' done me a heap o' good to have see a few outside things sometimes."

"An' didn't ye see no fine folks?" asked father, rather grimly.

"Well, I s'pose I could 'a' see all I wanted if I'd thought to ask Marier to interduce me; but, Lor', it slipped my mind. An' daughter, she seemed to think I didn't care to mingle with comp'ny, an' she said she knew 'twarn't healthy for me to be settin' up evenin's in the glare of them bright lights, so I useter go to bed real airly, 'cause it seemed as if I didn't have no call to set up all 'lone by myself. Sometimes I useter think I'd enjoy goin' down to the settin'-room an' watchin' all the fine folks comin' to call on Marier; an' once I told her I guessed I'd put on my best dress

—the black bombazine, you know, father (I've been real keerful of it for nigh six or seven years, an' it's most as good as new now)—an' set around in the best parlor a mite. But Marier, she kinder urged me not to take the trouble, 'cause she didn't think I'd oughter be bothered dressin' up for nobody, an' she give me a lot of nice books to read, an' said she guessed her friends would excuse me, an' she'd explain to 'em that I was tired an' couldn't stan' the confusion. 'Twas real thoughtful of Marier, warn't it, father?"

He got up and paced the room with his hands behind his back, and she went on:

"Seemed to me, father, that Ethie warn't growed into the girl we useter think she'd be. That kinder puzzled me! She's nine years old, but, Lor', she ain't only a child if she be nine; an' yet she didn't hug me none, nor run an' kiss me an' climb in my lap as she useter, an' when I'd talk to her she kind of answered saucy an' sort o' pert-like, an' I think —well, I think Ethie's kind of forgot how she useter love gran'ma. I dunno as it's the child's fault, for she goes to school, an' like as not l'arns them little snubby airs from some proud girls there. She don't take it from her ma, that's one thing, for Marier ain't the least bit proud in her ways, an' I don't think it could be in Marier to be 'shamed of her ma."

"Oh, no!" put in father, with a curious smile which his wife did not perceive. "But go on,

mother, let's hev the hull bla— the hull story, an' then you go lay down, an' I'll make ye a cup o' tea; you're clean tuckered out." She pressed his hand gratefully, but replied:

"You're real good, father, but I ain't goin' to hev you wait on me. There ain't much more to tell, only I didn't feel to fit in there at Marier's house as I feel to here, an' it kind of worrited me to think of you bein' here all 'lone, an' no women folks to do for ye, an'—an' it seemed like I wanted to see ye, father, so bad I couldn't stay away another minute, an' I knew ye wanted me, an'—well, well, it 'peared to me I couldn't wait even to write ye 'bout it, but I jest told Marier I must start right off, an' she——"

"She coaxed ye to stay longer, didn't she?" asked father; and after a moment's hesitation mother replied, with a shade of unwillingness in her tone:

"Well, you see, father dear, Marier would 'a' done so, but she was awful took up with some folks that was comin' from some place to stay over-night to her house, an' there was a sight to do 'bout the dinner for 'em, an' so she kind of forgot to ask me to—to stay. You can see how she could forgit it right in the middle of all she hed to do, can't ye, father?"—a little anxiously, as though fearful that he might misjudge and blame the dear only daughter she loved so devotedly.

Father looked at her a minute, and then nodded his head. "Yes, I can see it all, mother," said he,

tenderly patting her hand, and dispelling her anxiety with a smile.

She looked relieved, and after relating a few more items in such a way as she supposed would not betray lack of hospitality on her daughter's part, she yielded to her husband's urgent desire, and let him put her upon the comfortable lounge for a rest, and,

PULLED HIS OLD GRAY HEAD DOWN.

if possible, a little nap, before it should be time to get supper. As he arranged the pillow beneath her head with clumsy but affectionate solicitude, mother lifted her tired but glad eyes to his, and then, unable to control her pent-up feelings longer, burst into tears a second time, and pulled his old gray head down on the pillow beside her own.

"Oh, father, father!" she said; "it is so good to get home again, an' to—to hev the feelin' that you ain't in nobody's way, nor too old-fashioned to hev 'round before folks."

Then, as if she suddenly realized how much she had betrayed by that impulsive outburst, mother wiped her tears hastily away, and added earnestly:

"But I hed a grand visit in York, father! I want ye to believe that; an' I'm glad I went, 'cause"—she looked around the plain, old-fashioned room, where she felt so entirely in harmony with her surroundings and a delightful consciousness of her importance amidst them all—"'cause I've l'arnt better 'n ever that there ain't 'no place like home.' An' I've got one thing Marier ain't got, for all her fine house! Guess what it is, father?"—laughingly.

"The good cup o' tea I'm goin' to fetch along in a minute," he answered jestingly, and thinking pretty hard things against his fashionable daughter at the same time. (If mother had only been able to read his thoughts, she would have felt badly, dear, forgiving soul!)

"No, indeed, father dear; it's—*you!* An' while I've got you, I've done with visitin', father. The old farm's the best an' dearest place for me after this. An' as for Marier—well, Marier, she ain't so well off as I be, after all, but—I dunno as she knows it."

MY ONE LITTLE TALENT.

LOU, Dell, and I sat, on a certain morning, in disconsolate mood in Lou's room.

Lou — or Louie, to use her right name — had stretched herself on the lounge, while Dell and I were perched on the edge of the bed, and swung our restless feet to and fro for lack of something else to do.

The sunbeams of the beautiful day came dancing gayly in at the windows, searching out persistently every bare place in the shabby carpet, as well as every bruise and scratch on the furniture.

Louie's pretty brows contracted with the annoyance which seized her artist soul as she noticed the lack of harmony in the arrangement—as well as the general unbeautifulness—of the room.

That very morning papa had told us, gloomily enough, that he could no longer struggle against circumstances, etc.; that we must look our condition and its results fairly and boldly in the face, and prepare ourselves for real adversity at last; that business had gone wrong with him as with many others, and that though he had fought against the tide as long as he could, the time had come when he could do no more than drift on the current of events,

and steer clear, if possible, from the breakers that would—if worse came to worse still—overpower him and ourselves completely.

He could only say to us that whatever talents we possessed (and he flattered himself that his girls were about as well equipped in that way as any others), we must try to use to the best advantage, and that by so doing we could aid him in his part of the battle for comforts and necessaries, if not luxuries, etc.

Then he went down-town for an anxious day with his books and papers, and his "girls" were left to talk matters over amongst themselves.

Poor, darling father! Just two years previous he had been called a rich man, and we were such a happy, take-it-easy kind of family. We talked about "our set," and put on our little society airs and graces—at least Lou and Dell did, and I, the youngest lamb of the family flock, tried to do just as they did, although I was of a totally different kind from them, and "airs" set most ungracefully upon me.

Mamma gave little *recherché* dinners, and smiled at and talked to hosts of "dear, faithful friends" (save the title, if they were "friends," say I!), and we girls were called flatteringly "the three Graces," and all that.

Well, when we were dressed up stunningly, we were rather fair to look upon, but in our every-day gowns, and all alone by ourselves, we weren't particularly good-looking, except Louie, and she—well,

there was something about that girl which was dreadfully "fetching," and which made her look lovely whether she had any claim to it in her features or not. As for loveliness of character—if any girl alive could go ahead of our dear Louie there, I have yet to meet that girl.

Dell was as good a girl as one would find in ordinary life; and as for myself—I—I "passed," as Dell used to say, and with that I was contented enough.

So we lived, moved, and had our being in a flood of life's sunshine, and never dreamed of the shady side of its path.

But there came a day when we crossed over from our sunny side to the other where the shadows were falling, and it all came about through papa's overconfidence in a business acquaintance.

After that, he went about with a cloud on his brow, and every day a little new wrinkle came along, and we knew that his business cares pressed heavily.

In the midst of it, mamma, dear, gentle mamma, was taken ill, and the best of skill and nursing proved of no avail. Ah, me! shall I ever forget that time of loneliness for us all? We laid our kisses and our tears upon the sweet, placid face and the quiet, folded hands, and then—as soon as we could—we gathered up the broken threads and joined them again, going on with our efforts to keep papa cheerful and to drive away the dreaded crisis of his business worries by loving and hopeful encouragements.

Well, we did what we could ; it was a comfort to us to remember that, when at last he had to tell us the whole, miserable truth, and we were brought face to face with the matter as we had, somehow, failed to understand it before.

On this morning we were trying to come to some sensible conclusions, and yet we had, after all, been rather silent, owing to a feeling in our throats which disinclined us to talk.

It was Lou who first broke the silence.

"Well, we must do something, girls," said she, wearily putting back from her brow the soft mass of chestnut hair which, loosened from the hairpins, was tumbling about her face in great disorder (and enhancing her good looks wonderfully, I thought).

Dell swung one boot-heel against the other impatiently.

"Tell us something new, Lou, dear," she replied, with a French shrug of her graceful shoulders.

Then, seeing the anxious look in our invalid sister's eyes, she jumped from the bed and ran over to kneel beside the lounge penitently.

"You know that you have a talent, Lou," she continued. "A regular out-and-out, perfectly lovely talent, and that is your painting. Can't you make it serve you now for business as well as pleasure ?"

Lou looked surprised, but interested.

"Oh ! Dell, you don't imagine I paint well enough

to be able to sell my daubs, do you ? Why, I don't dare think of such a thing ! "

" Nonsense ; after all your lessons, and the compliments you have received from our friends ! " Then, with a curl of her upper lip, she added : " I wonder if those dear friends who so kindly ate mamma's dinners, and enjoyed her 'teas,' and danced at our 'swell occasions,' would lift a finger to help 'the three Graces' if we were starving for their aid ? I notice that they have fallen off in socialities since they discovered that we keep only one servant now, and no horses and carriages, no butler, no—' airs ' of any kind ! "

We all sighed mournfully, and shook our heads forlornly. Dell went on to say, with a laugh after that : " ' Good riddance to bad rubbish,' then, and let us be thankful that we own the house, and look fine as our neighbors outside, if we are so hollow within. Well !—now, Lou, you are to paint ; that must be understood once and for all. If you are our eldest, you've got to mind me in this instance, see ? "

Louie laughed helplessly : " All right, dear, I'll try gladly ; but then——"

" No 'buts' about it ! " said Dell. " And I am going to use my sort of half-way talent in music, by coaxing mothers to trust their children to me for scales and easy pieces. I'll choose little ones who won't discover how little I know about the thing I'm bold enough to teach. You see I can make

plenty of flourishes on the piano, and that sort of no-account show-off makes an impression on some folks, and—and I can scrub along, no doubt, with the children till they get far enough on to compel me to either stop short, or betray my ignorance—understand, girls ?"

"H'm-h'm," from me; and from Lou:

"Dell Sherman ! when you know you play most beautifully, and that people have always said——"

"I don't care a rap what people said," interrupted our impulsive Dell. "It's what people will *do* that I'm interested in now. Well, then, Lou paints, Dell pounds, and"—she turned to me—"what can the baby do, I wonder ?"

I gave a vicious kick to a chair near by.

"Land only knows ! There isn't, and never has been, the ghost of a talent in my composition, and I begin to realize now how perfectly mean it is for me to have been so neglected by the fairy godmothers !" I slid down from the bed, where I had kept my position all through the discussion, and walked restlessly about the floor.

Dell laughed teasingly.

"Oh, I know ! You can make cookies, Kitty, my dear. You have long been favored with the monopoly of skill in that line, you must be aware, and even Bridget says nobody ever made any better. You might go about on the avenues, you know, three times a week, with a basket on your arm, and before

long the city will ring with the praise of the 'Sherman cookies.'"

She got up from her lowly position beside the lounge, and went about the room crying: "Cookies! crisp, delicious cookies! the famous Sherman cookies! a few left! here they go!"

I had, long ere the close of her sensible speech, thrown myself sullenly, face downward, upon the bed, and now I cried out angrily: "I suppose a girl that's so unfortunate as to have no—no earthly kind of talent—hasn't any feelings to be trampled upon either!"

"Little goosie!"—from Dell, hauling me ungracefully nearer her repentant heart—"as if I didn't know that but for your dear little housekeeping ways we couldn't be as comfortable as we are—and—and papa would miss—" She broke off suddenly, and we all choked up for a minute, as was invariably the case when we allowed a mention of the dear one gone.

I returned Dell's sisterly squeeze, and went over to Lou.

"I'll tell you, girls, what I'm going to do. I'm going to be the 'looker after' of the family, you know. Keep your things all mended, and relieve you of the mending for papa, and keep an eye on Bridget. And oh, Lou, I can take your sketches to Reynolds' art store for you, while you are lame, you see, and then you can begin your painting at once, instead of waiting to use your foot." (Lou had

sprained her foot in some way the week before, and it still hurt her to walk much, and our good old doctor insisted that she must keep quiet for some time to come. She was not a very robust girl, anyhow, and sometimes Dell and I were worried lest she should follow mother all too soon for us, who wanted to keep her here.)

"That will be all we shall need, little sister, to make us happy and settled in mind at once," Louie said, smiling. "And if Dell's work and mine turn out as we hope, I don't think we shall—as we have feared—have to move from here, or to lose good old Bridget. Poor, faithful soul! she insists upon staying even though we have to cut so fearfully on her wages."

Well, so the discussion of ways and means had at last come to a satisfactory ending, and we began to be impatient for father's return in the afternoon, so that we might lay our plans before him.

We had our luncheon brought upstairs, as a sort of treat in honor of the new order of things, and then Dell started out to drum up pupils, if possible; Louie overhauled her portfolio of paintings, and I went to work at papa's bureau-drawers, hunting up something to mend.

When papa came home toward night, and we seated him in our midst to hearken to our tale of hopes and aspirations, it really seemed to me that at least four wrinkles disappeared from his forehead,

and that he looked years younger all of a sudden. I don't think—as I look back upon that time from my present standpoint—that he really had as much faith in our success, poor papa, as he had pleasure in the fact of our being willing to do all we could, and in our having met the hard problem with such determination to battle with it. No doubt he had expected, on his return that afternoon, to find three very doleful, forlorn-looking girls, red-eyed and red-nosed, and full of weeping and wailing over our downfall. But he was mistaken, you see, and the "surprise" was a tonic to his tired nerves and balm to his anxious heart.

On the next morning, while Dell was getting ready for her campaign (for she had secured four little pupils from some of the real "friends" amongst the host of the dear "five hundred"), and I was tightening a button on papa's coat, Lou was setting her palette with colors, and looking happier than I had seen her for a long time.

"I find I have quite a number of little sketches on hand," she said, "most of them in the sketch-book I used summer before last, you know, when—when we were travelling with mamma through the mountains. There are some bits of scenery and farm sketches which would work up, I think, quite prettily, if I am only competent to do it."

"Oh, dear!" sighed I, "to think that I have only

the commonplace talent of cooky-making, and that instead of catering to the sublime, as you and Dell may, I must confine my attentions almost solely to vulgar appetites, and see, as it were, my 'talent' devoured daily by a hungry family." They all laughed, and Dell gathered up her music for the "right about face and march" of her first day in the ranks. She kissed me, and then flew over to Lou. The portfolio lay beside the lounge where Lou was sitting with her easel before her.

Dell turned rapidly the contents of the portfolio, and then seeing the sketch-book, grabbed it hurriedly just to select a subject for Lou's brush.

"Here's a beauty, Lou," she said. "Do put it into colors; I'm sure it will sell."

My sister glanced at it, and suddenly a rosy blush spread from chin to forehead, but she replied quietly:

"I'm not particularly partial to that sketch, somehow. I don't think it is quite true to the idea I tried to convey from the original. No, I shall not bother with that, dear; I've plenty others prettier than that, and more easily made salable. I only hope I can dispose of them as fast as I can promise to get them ready." She kissed Dell, and presently we were alone.

I will, right here, say that my sister Louie had met and grown intimate with a young fellow named Richard Ware during the summer of the mountain

LOOKING OVER THE SKETCHES.

travel, and that there would have been a positive engagement between them but for the fact that Richard had been called to India on business for his firm, and papa had desired Lou to wait his return before engaging herself. Possibly he wished to test the strength of the love they thought they had for each other, and I think both Lou and Richard guessed that very thing; at any rate, they agreed to papa's wishes, and Richard went away before we were ready to leave the mountains. We all missed him, and Louie took no interest in anything for quite a while, till dear mamma grew anxious and expostulated with her. Well, after a few letters from Richard, which, because they were not engaged, you know, were not so secret that we weren't able to share them, there was a long silence, and then we heard that a dreadful fever had made havoc in India, in all directions, and ever so many had died. And in a list of the dead, soon after, we read the name of "Richard Ware," his manner of taking the disease (while caring for and nursing a sick friend), and other items connected with him, so that we knew there was no mistake. After that a gentleman, who had relatives in India where Richard had been residing, took a fancy to Lou, and she treated him kindly (suspecting nothing) because of his association with the country where Richard had been, and because he appeared to be only a pleasant acquaintance. When he finally offered himself, and was refused, of course, he seemed

so angry that we were afraid of him, and at last we had to come away to get rid of the man. Lou was afraid he would follow her home, for he was very persistent, and we learned later that he had bragged amongst his friends at the hotel that "he had won the prettiest girl of the season, and had only to name the day and she would gladly be his wife," and all that nonsensical string of fibs. Lou was so frightened that she became quite ill, and was only getting to be her old self again when mamma died, and the shock put my sister back in health greatly. She was now twenty-one years old. Dell was nineteen, and I half way between seventeen and eighteen. Old enough to have been as clever and apt as my sisters, but, alas! I wasn't.

Well, to go back, after this long detour.

While Lou painted, I hunted up some pieces of an old black silk dress of mamma's, and manufactured a new "string tie" for papa. I found several buttons were needing to be made secure about his wardrobe, and his best suit required the use of alcohol in the removal of sundry spots here and there.

Louie had usually looked after him, and—after myself, if I must be honest, also; but I found that I wasn't so helpless, after all, and that if being useful as "chief cook and bottle-washer" could be considered a "talent," I meant to show that talent at once.

I also found time to run down to the kitchen and

have some lovely cookies ready for luncheon, and I wasn't the least in Bridget's way. Dear old Bid! she taught me long ago how to make those cookies; and how pleased mamma was when I exhibited my very first and successful batch! I'll never forget it.

When Lou had a number of pretty little oil pictures ready for market, I put on my best bib and tucker, and started one bright day for the art store where I had often noticed pictures for sale on commission in the window. The man looked at the four I had carried down, and held them off, and screwed up one eye at them, and twisted his head about over them until I was fairly tired waiting an answer to my question.

But he finally pronounced them very fine indeed, and said he would give them a fair chance, and would take as many on commission as the young lady would send, etc. Wasn't I glad? I fairly flew home, and told the good news with as pure joy and relief as though I had been the artist. Dear old Lou, how pleased she was, too!

"To think that he thought them worth selling for me," she said, modestly, and I spunked up in a jiffy.

"Worth selling!" cried I. "Well, Lou Sherman, I can tell you that there wasn't a blessed one in that store that was one bit prettier than those pictures you did. And the man knew what he was about, never fear, when he offered to take more."

When Dell came home her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shining.

"I've three more pupils," said she—"friends of the others; and I tell you what, girls, teaching music isn't the hardest thing in life! I'm hungry; let's have lunch. Say, Lou, what about old Reynolds and the pictures?"

When we told her the news, she ran and hugged Lou, and then whirled me about in a mad dance.

"Good for you both!" she said, and patted me on my head. "Your talent 's coming on finely, baby! Cooky maker and picture broker, button sewer and clothes mender—all combined in one enormous 'talent.' Whew!"

"Do stop calling me 'baby,' Dell Sherman," retorted I, "or I'll leave your stockings holey, and make too few cookies for you to share any."

She laughed, and stood before the glass to arrange the pretty goldeny fluff on her forehead. Standing there, her eyes caught the reflection of Lou's face, and noticed how thin and white the cheeks were getting to be.

Turning around, she said: "Spare a little of that sunset color, dear, for your cheeks. They're far too much like the petals of the lily you painted in that flower-piece the other day."

Louie leaned back on the sofa pillows as though she were tired, and laid down her brush.

"Am I pale, really?" she replied, questioning

Dell with a smile. "Perhaps I work too hard. I can't stop, now I've begun, you know; and we have only your fingers and my brush between us and discomfort, Dell, for a little while. We can't take too much ease in work."

"Isn't father getting on in the new place?" asked Dell, a trifle anxiously. "He said the salary was fair, but think how it hurts him to step down from commanding to being commanded, you know. Poor, darling old dad!"

"He's doing as well as he expected," replied Lou; "but we are closely pressed, aren't we, after all?"

During this I was anxiously watching Lou. I hadn't noticed how thin she really was getting to be, until Dell spoke, and now it seemed as if I couldn't bear it a minute longer.

"Why," said I to myself, "before we know it, Lou will be half way over the other side, and as for losing her so easily, it simply can't be permitted. Something has got to be done, and I shall think till I drop before I'll give up trying to see a way out of this new scrape."

That night I cried myself to sleep, and was "headachey" in the morning, beside having a swollen nose and red lids to be questioned about at breakfast. The "grippe" being handy, I was able to throw some of the blame on that amiable disease, and passed my disreputable appearance off as possible symptoms of a "coming attack of the fashionable woe."

Day by day I tormented myself with the question: What can I do to help in the gathering in of funds, instead of idling my time away over the work-basket, which, though it seemed sufficient to my family for "only Kitty" to attend to, made me feel ashamed of myself, all the same.

And it did appear to me that my appetite had never been so perfectly enormous as lately! I seemed to be on the point of eating my family out of house and home.

I called myself a selfish, greedy thing, and over and over resolved that I would put myself upon strict diet; and all the while the thing went on and on, and I questioned myself uselessly.

No answer to the questions ever came, or would come, I thought, at last, in despair.

But bills—oh, they came fast enough! Like little insect stings, they pricked and annoyed us, and the more we got rid of them, the more fresh stings were felt. Papa, of course, had the big bills in charge, but we girls—we girls, indeed! no, Lou and Dell, bless the clever creatures!—they had the little bills on their dear shoulders. And they paid them, too; they paid them, and I—devoured the worth of them!

I had a room all to myself. I am almost ashamed to tell you why, but I'm sworn to truth all through this narrative, and will therefore confess that I was such a "snorer" that nobody could share my room

and have an absolutely dreamless rest. (At least that is what Dell declared, and no doubt she was right, although I never discovered myself to be snoring.)

However, to have my own private apartment suited me, and when, at last, I had solved the problem, and my questions from self to self were answered, I rejoiced beyond words over my privacy.

It all came about by my hearing papa tell Dell one day (after I had finished dinner, and left the table to speak to Bridget) that "Kitty was very original in her ideas and expressions."

Like a flash it came over me then and there that nature had intended me to be an authoress. I would write wonderful, electric stories, and by and by Lou would illustrate the writings of the "clever authoress, Miss Kate Sherman." How excited I got at the bare idea of it all! The more I pondered the matter, the more I jumped at the inspiration, and I hugged my secret carefully, so as to take my dear ones by complete surprise. Well, at the very first opportunity I shut myself in my room and went to work.

The sunshine came merrily in, and I fancied it was polishing up the ideas I scribbled so rapidly on the sheet of "foolscap" I had stolen from papa's desk. I had no idea—before then—how remarkably easy it was to write poems, and so I wrote several of them before I leaned back complacently to read them aloud to myself (a delighted auditor, surely).

They all sounded pretty fair, I thought, and I calculated would bring me about ten dollars apiece. I decided to write one more and make the number even. But, alas! I got into difficulty in the matter of a rhyme before I had gone far. This was to be a very touching affair, a more pathetic style of verse than the others, and I wanted a rhyme for "pining heart." I could not quite find the sentiment I wished to convey in either *dart, art, start, part, cart, tart, mart,* or any other sort of rhyme, and I worked myself into a regular stew over the thing.

Finally I gave it up, and tore the sentimental effort into bits; then I rolled the manuscripts up into a small compass—as small as possible, to make it look dainty and refined in the editorial opinion (fancy my ignorance! I blush at this late day to recall it)—and, much pleased with myself, went out to mail my precious package in secret.

On the next day I set to work upon a story. (My talent should not be confined to mere poetry.) It was a thrilling tale of love and blighted hopes, of despair and grief, and was to finish with a grand "all hands around" suicide. Not having time to do the business up in one day, nor daring to keep too much by myself for fear Louie would miss and question me, I was therefore a number of days, at such odd moments as I could steal, working up my story.

I wished it to come out in a magazine. It finished at last, on its fortieth page, and the only fault it con-

tained, in my modest opinion, was its brevity! But then I had positively not been able to spread my ideas one line further, and so it had to end just there.

The next time I took Lou's pictures to Reynolds (by the way, I ought to say that on the day before she had received quite a large check from the art store, and we were all so proud of her), I carried my own work with me, secretly, of course.

After leaving the art store, I found my way to the big building where the famous "——" magazine was edited. Wearily I climbed the many long staircases, being afraid of the elevators, and finally reached the office door.

Telling my poor, fluttering little heart to have courage, I opened the door, and grew as red as the reddest rose that ever grew, for the room was full of masculine life, and every eye was turned upon me. My precious brain-work was finally left in safe hands, and, with as much scare as hope, I groped my way through the ill-lighted passages down to the entrance door.

Just before reaching the end of the last flight of stairs my foot slipped, and I fell plump into the arms of a gentleman who was about to ascend the stairs.

No doubt he saved me a serious tumble, and I thanked him, a little confused by the sudden encounter, of course. He proved to be a good-looking young man, a gentleman in every sense of the word,

and I liked him right away, because I didn't see any reason why I should not.

But there was every reason why I should not allow him to know that, so I tilted my chin in air (under the impression that it added to the dignity of my appearance), and endeavored to sweep majestically away.

Alas! I had turned my foot just enough to lame me a trifle, and he saw me limp (no stately gait possible) toward the door.

"Allow me to hail a car," he cried; and presently I was courteously handed into one. He touched his hat, and we parted. When I reached home, the postman stood at the door. He handed me a thick letter which bore the name of the paper to which my poems had been sent, and told me there were four cents due. I counted out the pennies, with burning cheeks and a profound gratitude that I had arrived on the spot in time to save my rejected poems from other eyes; for what would Lou, or Bridget—or Dell, if she were at home—have thought had they seen the envelope addressed to me from an editorial office? Such a humiliated feeling took possession of me!

Tearing open the envelope, I went to the kitchen (as soon as I had let myself in with my latch-key very softly), and cautiously peeped in. No, Biddy was not there. I stood alone in the middle of the floor, and read the editorial decree which pronounced my efforts "not quite suited to the needs," etc., etc.

Then I thrust the whole bunch of disappointments into the range and saw them blaze to ashes. Then I went softly upstairs and cried and cried, and had hard work getting rid of the tell-tale traces before the dinner hour brought us all together again.

Well, days passed. Dell regularly earned money;

AND CRIED AND CRIED.

Lou regularly earned the same. Papa was busy likewise, and even Bridget was earning away as fast as she could by her faithful work and devotion. But I—ah, me! I could only wait for word from the dilatory editor who had my wonderful story in hand. And how long he was in sending me that word!

About half my former conceit had gone meekly out from my composition, and I was devoured by anxious fears. Since my poems had not met with the success they deserved, owing to the non-recognition of their merits by an "incompetent editor" (?), I considered it quite likely that my story, with all its thrilling excitabilities, would meet with the same unfortunate misunderstanding.

Well, after a while patience ceased to be a virtue, and I marched—under cover of an errand for Lou—straight down to the office, and made inquiries in person as to the fate of my manuscript. . . .

I received—"a check"; oh, yes, indeed. But it wasn't of the sort I wanted. It was merely a check to my high-flown aspirations and ambitions, and I left the office with a rage in my heart and a "fire in my eye" which won't bear description here.

Out in the street, with my manuscript in my pocket (and a check for Lou from the art dealer in my pocketbook), I walked hastily on, and met my former "rescuer" face to face.

He lifted his hat with a pleasant smile, and said:

"I trust you are quite recovered from the effects of your fall the other day?"

I tilted my chin as high as possible, and replied that I was quite well, and thanked him. Alas! as I endeavored to sail majestically past, a wretched banana-skin must needs come in contact with my

foot, and once more I was "nobly rescued" by the young stranger.

It was so funny that, in spite of myself, I couldn't help laughing—a sort of nervous laugh, to be sure, but it broke the ice—and he joined in the laugh, and then he asked "if he had the pleasure of speaking to one of the contributors of the '——' magazine, as I seemed to have frequent business at the office," etc.

I blushed, and replied that "I had merely called on behalf of—of—a friend, but that I had no talent that way; oh, no, indeed!"

When I reached home I made another secret and forlorn visit to the kitchen, and presently my soul-stirring efforts on paper were assisting the tea-kettle to "get up steam," and I at least had the consolation of reflecting that my story was actually (as I had intended it to be) what might truthfully be looked upon as a "pot-boiler."

So my grand notions in regard to authorship ended in smoke, and I remained merely "the youngest of those Sherman girls," utterly without a talent of any kind. More lonely tears at night, more self-reproaches day by day, and then I arrived at the conclusion that, as it wasn't my fault that I'd been born "a poor stick," I wasn't going to care another bit about it. I had tried, and I had failed, and now I should simply do whatever came along to be done, and if I couldn't do any personal

"shining," why, I could catch a moiety of my sisters' glory by reflection, of course.

Days went by, and I still carried Lou's pictures, and received for her the price of her pretty wares, and I was doing something else beside—I was getting more and more friendly with the young gentleman to whom fate had introduced me by the aid of a slippery stair and a banana-skin. We seemed to be continually running into each other (it puzzled me to know why it happened so), and I could no more have helped liking him than I could have helped —being glad when I met him. (But that was a secret, though I had told my family of the incidents which had come about in the first place, of course.) So it happened that we became good friends, then better friends, and, by and by, the best friends in the world; and I began once again to feel a little important, and less like an "encumberer of the ground."

It chanced, also, that Mr. Randall (his name) had been introduced to papa by some mutual business friend recently, and he took advantage of that matter to venture a call at our house, and order a picture from Lou for an imaginary friend (which at the time we supposed to be a real one). He also found some good, prompt-paying music pupils for Dell, thereby increasing the number to twelve, and rejoicing her heart as well.

He finally grew into "an intimate" with the family, and was like a whole shower of sunbeams whenever he appeared. (Of course, it isn't necessary for me to explain that all this came about gradually, though in the telling it may sound like "rushing" things.)

But as I had found him first, I couldn't help feeling that he was more *my* friend than the girls could claim him theirs, and I was sure that he showed a little preference for me, too, in various ways.

I had told him many things, but never had I betrayed the wreck of my authorship hopes to him. No, indeed; that period of humiliation was locked in my secret heart.

Well, one morning Lou was too sick to get up for the day, and she directed me where to find the oil sketches she had prepared for Reynolds.

How pretty they were! One especially, which had slipped between the pages of her sketch-book, seemed too lovely not to bring a good price; and although it wasn't intended, evidently, to have gone with the others, I determined to take it along, and told Dell so.

She glanced at it, while sorting her music, and said indifferently:

"Oh, that's the sketch Lou didn't like. You know I told her that first day how pretty I thought it, and she said she had others which suited her

better. Maybe she won't like to have you take it down."

"I sha'n't ask her ladyship," said I; "she's silly, and too modest by half. This picture is the best yet, and will prove the winning card, see if it don't. She ought to get fifty dollars for that, if it isn't bigger than a sheet of commercial note."

I made up my mind to smile upon Reynolds as I never had smiled before, and if he couldn't be persuaded by smile and picture combined to do his level best in getting a big price for that sketch, which would give my beautiful sister a big surprise, then I would never smile on him again!

He looked at it critically (he always did that; it was simply a habit, for Lou's pictures were beyond criticism). It was a simple subject, but somehow it told its little story well—a twilight sky tinged with the sunset's afterglow; a stretch of fertile meadow, with a background of trees outlining their tops against the tender haze of the atmosphere; a meadow gate, and two figures—a man and a woman—both young, and both seemingly engaged in the old, old story, which, however, is always new.

"Call it a 'Meadow Romance,' or a 'Twilight Story,' or something like that," said I; and he agreed that the latter would do nicely.

"Why didn't the young lady please herself with the titling of it?" asked he.

"Oh, because, I—suppose she—she forgot it," said I, half guiltily.

As I left the store it began to rain, and there was I, minus umbrella and rubbers (and a new hat on, which hat I had manufactured out of two old ones, with the addition of new ribbons, and a sort of knack which made Dell say she believed my talent to have been millinery, after all). I gathered up my skirts and made a rush for a car.

A hand was laid upon my arm, and an umbrella held over my head, and there was Mr. Randall, as usual, on hand for another emergency of mine, the first, by the way, since the banana-skin episode.

"Careless girl! I was talking business with a friend at the corner, and chanced to see you. How could you venture out in this unprotected way when the sky has been treacherous all the morning?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Oh, well, it doesn't make much difference. This is one of my blue days, and looking at Lou's lovely work there at Reynolds' has made me more and more disgusted with myself. I'd just as soon be rained on as not!"

"Indeed? Well, I wouldn't as soon you were," he replied, walking along beside me, and allowing the raindrops from the edges of the umbrella to trickle inside his shirt-collar, so that its whole shelter might cover me. "What's the matter with you, Kitty Sherman?"

"The lack of a single ordinary—I don't ask an extraordinary—talent," replied I, pettishly. "There are the girls; look at all they can do. Here am I; look at me!"

"With pleasure, little Miss Kitty," laughed he. "I've been in the habit of looking at you for a long time, and I've discovered that you have a talent, though you may not guess it, and that is—that is——"

He lowered the umbrella a little and closed our two heads in more snugly, and then he added: "You have the talent of making people love you, and of making me, who never fell in love before, so deep in the 'well of love' for you that I never can get out again. And I don't want to, and sha'n't try."

"Why, Charlie Randall!" I exclaimed, starting so far apart from him that the umbrella caught in my hat and pulled my head over in the direction of his own again.

"There, you see the folly of trying to walk apart from me," he said, merrily. "Now, be honest, Kitty; this is a fair and square offer, and I'll give you a week to decide whether you will *write* your 'yes' to me, or whisper it some day when I call to see you. You needn't wait a week if you don't want to, but I say that so as to be generous in the matter."

"Here's my car, Mr. Assurance," I said; "and I advise you, in parting, not to count too certainly on the affirmatives of this life. Thanks for the umbrella. Good-by!"

He called the very next evening.

Lou and Dell were trying to talk business with papa when he entered.

"Oh, dear!" laughed Dell, "I can't understand half these business terms papa keeps using. If I were only a young man, instead of a helpless girl, now! I wish we had a brother, papa, to go over those tiresome matters with you. But here's Mr. Randall; he's the next best thing."

He bowed, and laughed. "I'll be the best thing, instead of the 'next best,' most gladly, Miss Dell, if" —he turned and looked roguishly at poor me!—"if your little Kitty will kindly make me your brother."

There! the whole thing was out, and he had told me he would wait a week!

I blushed, and laughed with the rest of us, and papa looked surprised, but not angry at all, and—well, that settled my future, so far as we could see, and I was amazed to learn how important a member of the family I had suddenly grown when looking at myself through Charlie's eyes.

Well, it never rains a good time but it pours one, you know, and so one day a bronzed, bearded fellow passing Reynolds' store saw the "Twilight Story," went in and bought it, learned the artist's name, and came at once to claim her old promise to him.

Of course Lou fainted dead away, and Dell and I were furious with Richard Ware for having brought it all about.

"When you died in India, why didn't you die more thoroughly," demanded Dell, "instead of letting our poor girl grieve and mourn over you, when you weren't worth it, after all?"

Then came the explanations (always about the same, to be sure, in like instances, but acceptable for all that). Richard had been very ill, and close upon death. He didn't know till long after, during a tedious convalescence, that a premature notice of his death had been circulated. Before he was allowed to write or to talk much, he heard that Lou was to marry a rich man whom she had met after he left home. Knowing that as she was not engaged to him she had a right to do as she pleased, and supposing her father to be carrying out a previously formed plan, and all that, he called his pride to his aid, put her out of his mind (or tried to), arranged business matters so that he could remain away as long as he chose, and—well, the result was no end of suffering at heart for both young people.

It was plain to us girls, on hearing Richard's tale, that the arrogant boaster whom Lou had refused that summer at the mountains, and who had, as we knew at the time, a lot of acquaintances out in India, had, in his confidence of ability to win the girl, boasted too soon to his distant friends, and so the rumor had grown till it had reached poor Richard's ears. He agreed with us, as the circumstances were told him, and then went on

to relate that he had only recently arrived in his native city, and by kind fate had been led to pass Reynolds' store, where the picture—which he recognized as one representing my sister and himself, and the painting of which had been Lou's and his secret that happy summer—was exhibited. Naturally he went in to buy and ask about it. In that way he learned that she was not married, but Miss Louie Sherman still, and so—well, behold! the rift in the clouds, and the blue behind.

"Hard times" seemed not quite so hard and unyielding; "hard work" grew into a pleasure; we would have been perfectly happy but for the "empty chair" which stood between us and the gladness our dear mother would have shared with such delight.

Well, this is all of my story. Louie and Richard Ware are man and wife, and he bids fair to "ware" as well as most of his sex.

Dell will be an "old maid," and it will be a sad calamity, too, for some sure-to-come lover, for Dell is lovely. But she has made up her mind not to marry —she says. Charlie and I are waiting a little, till papa is willing to let me fly from the home nest, and we can't coax him to say when that may be. But I am happy as the day is long, particularly as nobody can ever say again that Kitty Sherman didn't possess at least "one talent."

THEIR EXPERIMENT.

HE toiled slowly up the mountain side from the hay-fields below. He timed his stride to the measure of his favorite song, "Home, Sweet Home," which he whistled cheerily to help him forget that he was "clean beat out!"

His broad-brimmed hat lay far back on the crown of his gray head, and beneath a pair of bushy brows gleamed kind blue eyes from which the shine of earlier years had not yet departed. Beneath the cheeks and chin a fringe of short

gray beard gave an odd, "full-moon" appearance to the front view of his face.

He had rolled his shirt sleeves well up above his elbows, and the sinewy arms glistened with the moisture of perspiration, which also showed in stains upon his shirt back.

Midway between the hay-fields and the red roof of the farm-house high up the mountain side, a tree stood straight and tall above its fellows.

The farmer had named this spot the "half-way halt," because of a broad, flat rock which nature had placed directly beneath the overhanging branches of the big tree, affording a comfortable seat upon which to rest and draw new strength for the other half of the climb. Fixing his gaze upon this especial tree, Farmer Grey increased his speed and quickened his time, wiping meanwhile the moisture from his forehead with an old-fashioned red silk handkerchief, and flicking away the too attentive mosquitoes which followed him.

"Beats all what a consarned hot day like this can do to make a man feel mean an' upsot-like!" he muttered irritably, every now and then slapping his cheeks and his arms, and thereby relieving his pathway of one or more of the swarming pests about him.

Reaching the "half-way halt" at last, and making a fan of his hat's broad brim, the farmer surveyed with appreciative eyes the lovely landscape about

him. Below lay the pretty village of Ellenville, cosily nestling at the feet of the "Shau'gun" Mountains, and sending its wide, fertile meadows and farm-lands in all directions. Like a thread of silver the canal curved its waters in and out beside grassy banks and through thick shrubbery, now in cool shadow, and again catching the shine of the day's lingering sunbeams, out for a last frolic before old Sol should call them for the night.

Along the winding roads—so far down, in fact, that they looked like pigmies from the height of the farmer's point of view—the farm-boys were driving home their cows, and the tinkle-tinkle of cowbells came floating up with fond, familiar melody to Farmer Grey's ears.

"A pretty pictur," thought he, "a mighty pretty sight fer eyes to see; an' a man somehow feels nigher the good God who made it all when he gits a chance, like this 'ere, to jest take it in. But"—he turned about on his rocky seat and sent his gaze up the mountain side, where the red roof of his home showed prettily from out its surroundings of mountain foliage—"to my mind there ain't no prettier pictur in the world o' natur than that there homestead o' mine. I love it root an' branch, an' there ain't a thing I love a mite better, 'cept it's the woman inside, an' that's my old Hanner, God bless her!"

And well might the farmer cling so devotedly to the old home which had sheltered his parents, and in

which he, the last of the children born there, and the only survivor of them all, had lived so long with the wife of his young manhood's choice. The old house had grown gray with its owner, but there was plenty of sturdy life in them even yet.

The evening breezes were quickening as Farmer Grey arose from his seat and proceeded on his way. He chanced to see a bunch of red blossoms on the path, and plucked them with the thought that he would take them home to "Hanner." He used to do that when they were lovers, and those old, lover-like gallantries had clung to his nature, somehow, through the years of his married life, and who could doubt but that many an angle had been rounded into harmless curves by such trifles?

The homestead doors were standing open to admit the breezes. It had not been so intensely warm up there on the mountain side as the farmer had felt it in the lower hay-fields, but, as Hannah expressed it to her only companion, the cat, "it had been hot enough, the land knows!"

She had been a very busy woman all day, but as the cool of the afternoon drew near she had "tidied up" for her husband's coming.

The sky was yet in its golden evening prime when she came out upon the porch (which faced the sunset and the valley) and stood under the climbing vines, clasping her hands restfully before her, their

blue veins and knotted sinews showing plainly against the background of her white apron. Hannah was not a handsome woman, nor had she been a handsome girl, but there was a certain attraction about her plain face which had caused Eben Grey, in the time of their courtship and during the years since their marriage, to believe most fondly that "he had won the most beautiful woman the world contained." A pair of sweet, dark eyes redeemed the lack of symmetry in the large mouth. A good, healthy color showed in her face behind the lines which had accumulated there during her sixty years of life. An abundance of hair, soft and gray, like Eben's, parted in natural waves each side of her brow, and was coiled in a tidy knot at the back of her head.

Standing there, in the peace of the midsummer's waning day, Hannah turned her gaze wistfully over the valley. Her eyes sought for and found two little mounds which, lying side by side, were linked together, as it were, by one broad white headstone.

The shadow of the church steeple (the little burying-ground lay close beside the village church) had not yet fallen athwart the headstone upon which the woman now gazed, but the gleam of the setting sun shone brightly upon it, and rested tenderly upon the two small mounds beneath.

The stone was lettered, and told to the passer-by that on such a day of such a month in 18—, Eben and his sister Hannah, aged ten years, twin children

of Eben and Hannah Grey, had "fallen asleep after a short and severe illness," etc.

To be sure, very little save the gleam of the white headstone could be seen from the distance of the farm-house porch, but that was sufficient for Hannah, who only wanted—as had been her loving custom since the day her babies were laid there—to waft her good-night kisses to them with each sundown.

That the passing of many years should have healed Eben's grief and stilled the yearnings of his heart when he thought of the children, was, Hannah said to herself, "only nat'ral, seein' as a man's made diff'runt from women folks, an' ain't got the fac'lty of rememberin' grief an' sich; though 'twarn't 'cause they hadn't tender feelin's, but jest 'cause they hadn't the time to be thinkin' of their troubles."

The cat came purring and rubbing against the woman's ankles. She hastily brushed a sudden mist from her eyes, and lifted puss in her arms.

"'Tain't so silly as it 'pears to be—is it, pussy?—for a woman that's been a mother, even if 'twas a powerful long way back, to keep a-wishin' she had her babies agen, an' to feel as if she wanted to kiss 'em an' be kissed by 'em agen 'cause her heart's so chuck full o' motherly love even yet! But father, he mustn't ketch us complainin' 'bout it. Oh, no; he'd laugh an' say, 'What's the use o' frettin'?' an' I

know there ain't a mite of use in it. Come, let's go an' get your supper, pussy."

She went to the kitchen, and while puss was lapping her cream, the table was set and all things made ready for the simple evening meal.

Like her husband, Hannah had her favorite amongst tunes, and it was the good, old-fashioned "Oh, let us be joyful!" which was wont to enliven her work and express her contentment with the world in general. She tried to set it going now, but somehow it hung back, and finally died out of her throat, perhaps for the reason that the little white headstone was still before her mental vision.

Pretty soon she returned to the porch and sat down on the low door-sill, her elbows on her knees and her chin resting in the hollow of her hands.

She presented a picture of too much sadness and meditation to suit Eben, who, coming out of the woodland road, looked anxiously at his wife, and wondered "what ailed Hanner." She had not observed him, so he crept softly to the side of the porch and peered through the vines at her drooping figure.

He saw that her eyes were turned valleyward, and a slight frown gathered between his brows.

"I'll bet a cucumber she's been a-watchin' them graves down yonder," he thought, "an' that's jest the long an' short o' the thing! If 'tain't them graves, then she's took sick or somethin'!"

He scraped his foot on the gravel, and in an instant Hannah came back from the years agone and turned to meet the laughing face of her husband peeping at her through the tangle of vines at her side.

"Hello, mother, here I be!" he exclaimed merrily; "a mite late, too, ain't I?"

He put his arm about her when she stepped down to meet him, and gave her a sounding smack of affection on her cheek.

"Here's a posy I fetched along," he said, as they walked around to the kitchen dooryard. "Thought ye'd kind o' like to know the old chap was thinkin' 'bout ye."

She looked pleased, and tilted her head back that his clumsy fingers might more easily fasten the posy at her throat.

When he had finished he stepped back to contemplate the result, and a rosy color crept into her cheeks as the blue and the brown eyes met.

"Wal', there, mother," exclaimed the farmer; "it does seem's though you grow prettier 'n' younger 'bout every day. Them eyes o' yourn ain't lost a mite o' shine sence you was little Hanner Jane Hawkins; now that's a fact, mother."

"G' long, father; you always was the beat for flatterin', an' old age ain't druv the trick out of ye yet," said Hannah, still blushing, and feeling as lively as though her years had suddenly dropped

away from her, and she were indeed the little village sweetheart of Eben's younger days.

Plenty of soap and cool spring water, which Hannah had set "right to hand" for her husband, acted upon his nerves like a strong tonic, and when he had made himself presentable by the vigorous use of brush and comb he felt like a new man and at peace and charity with the world about him. As he "drew up" at the table for his savory supper, puss came with her usual loud purr to attract his attention. Artful cat as she was, at no hour of the day did she so overflow with affectionate demonstrations as at the approach of meal-time, when her various senses were so strongly appealed to in certain ways. The farmer stooped stiffly—for his old bones were tired out—and patted the animal's head.

"Beats all, don't it, mother," he asked, "how like humans them cat-critters can be! Seems 's if a child couldn't ask no plainer to be petted an' loved a bit; now, doesn't it?"

Hannah, setting golden balls of butter upon the table, glanced at her cat, and answered quietly:

"Yes; I've often sorter felt that 'twas a dreadful pity she warn't a human critter, a—a little child, so to speak."

"Sho, now! you wouldn't reely like that, mother!" he said, with a touch of anxiety in eyes and tone. "A child 'd make a sight o' work on yer hands, an', land o' creation! ain't ye got enough to take keer on

a'ready in Tom an' me? Why, hello, where *is* Tom? Better call him in, mother, hadn't ye?"

"Tom's gone s'archin' the red cow, father," explained Hannah. "She strayed somewhere, an' Tom reckoned he'd have an airly bite o' supper, ye know, an' start along 'fore dark. It does beat all how that there crittur'll stray the fust chance she gits!"

The husband and wife now settled down to the business before them, and pussy took up a position near her master, where she could keep a watchful eye upon him and the occasional bits he was wont to toss her slyly, when "mother warn't lookin'," for both he and puss knew that they were "naughty" when that kind of work was going on.

"Ready, Hanner?" asked Eben, presently. Hannah nodded, and then the two gray heads were reverently bowed while Eben asked the blessing he had learned in his boyhood at his father's table.

"For what we now receive, Lord, make us thankful, an' bless all to Thy glory an' our good. Amen."

As Hannah presently sipped her tea, she beamed over upon her husband. He, devouring with relish a slice of cold corned beef, also beamed over upon his wife.

She was thinking: "Land sakes! if any woman 'round these parts has got a better lookin' man than my Eben, I'd like to set eyes on him, if I do say it that's Eben's own wife!"

He was thinking: "I ain't see my Hanner's beat

AT SUPPER.

yet, an' I ain't like to, what's more; an' I've summered an' wintered 'long of her a heap o' years, an' long enough to hev found out her bad p'ints if she'd hed any, which she ain't, if I do say so."

Presently he stopped eating, and questioned Hannah. "Say, wife, warn't you feelin' upsot 'bout the time I come home just now?"

She started guiltily.

"Well, father, I s'pose there was a sort o' feelin' that way, but, Lor', I don't know what possessed me, lest I was tuckered out more'n usual. Seems 's if it'd been a dreadful hot day."

"Ye was a-lookin' down the valley, mother; that's what possessed ye. Don't tell me!"

Hannah flushed, and looked anxiously into the keen blue eyes opposite her.

"There warn't no harm in it, Eben," she said gently, and he shook his head reprovingly.

"No, mother, no harm; but if I was you, wife, if lookin' down in the valley's a-goin' to make ye feel sorrerful all the time, why, 'pears to me I wouldn't look in the direction o' them leetle graves, that's all. I'd sorter glance t'other way of the village, ye know."

He returned to his corned beef, and Hannah swallowed a lump in her throat with the aid of her cup of tea, and then she said, quite cheerily:

"There, father dear, don't you worry a mite 'bout me. I ain't goin' to pick out the sad sights in natur

to look at, you may be sure, when there's, land knows, enough o' beautiful things to be glad fer. You're right, father; there ain't a mite o' use cryin' over spilt milk."

After supper Eben went out to the barn, and shortly after, as his wife stood at her dish-washing, she smiled to hear the refrain of "Home, Sweet Home," wafted in at the kitchen door on the fragrant twilight breezes.

The leaves of the red blossoms under her chin somehow sent a wave of pleasure through her heart, and she said, half aloud: "Well, when my children were taken, the kind Lord left me still a powerful blessin' behind, in the dear husband that's the sunshine of my life, an' I ain't no right to fret 'bout past an' gone troubles, if I've only the sense to know it."

After her kitchen work was finished, Hannah went into the small bedroom and gave herself another "tidying up" for the evening. She laid aside her work apron, and replaced it with a cleaner one, which smelled of lavender, and tied the broad white strings in a prim bow behind.

As she stood before the small glass (which long ago had reflected the chubby face of the fat little Eben Grey of that period), a host of memories swarmed in Hannah's mind, and she almost forgot to put the finishing touches to her soft gray hair.

The sound of Tom's whistle as he came home

through the lane, driving the laggard cow of his search before him, recalled Hannah to the present state of her life, and she made more haste over her toilet.

"Well, there," she thought; "I ain't so young as I was, to be sure, but it don't seem as if Eben thinks I'm a mite older. I dunno's I need to worry 'bout bein' so wrinkly an' plain to look at, 'long as father don't seem to keer, nor even to see that I'm a-gittin' old an' homely. Deary me, I don't s'pose I've ever been what could be called reely harnsome, but it's one's duty to do the best one kin with the temples of our souls, an' I'm goin' to do it for Eben's sake as fur as my materials 'll allow. Some temples is a sight harnsomer than others, but—well, there, I guess the Lord ain't goin' to jedge by the outside of a creetur when it's the soul concerns Him most."

Presently she went to the "keepin' room" and lit the astral lamp (the pride of her heart, as it stood in the centre of the worsted lamp-mat she had made when a young girl, as a present to Eben's mother).

The evening would be short, and if the farmer was going to read the weekly paper he would have to begin as soon as his chores were finished, she knew.

"Light looks cheery, mother," he said, coming in at last, "an' makes a fellow feel sot up fer all he's wuth, I tell ye!"

He looked at his linen coat hanging on its peg behind the door; then, with a twinkle in his eyes:

"Say, mother, it's sech a powerful hot night, seems 's if I'd be a sight more comf'table a-settin' in my shirt sleeves, ef you don't mind."

She laughed, and rocked slowly back and forth, clicking her knitting-needles merrily.

"You're good fer me to look at, father, no matter what ye wear," she said tenderly. "I'm always wantin' ye to be comf'table, ye know."

So presently the reading of the "Weekly Gossip" was begun. Eben read aloud in his drawling tones the news of all that had happened (and much beside that never had and never would happen, for the "Gossip" was true to its name), and Hannah listened delightedly, while the yarn stocking grew and grew, and the cat blinked and winked at her feet. Tom came in and sat down also to listen, and the clock struck the hour of eight almost before they were ready for it.

Then Hannah rolled up her knitting and put it in her work-basket. Tom yawned and said "he rarther guessed the bed would be 'bout as good a place to go to as any spot on the airth for a spell." Eben went to the tall old clock in the corner and wound it up. Then while he was looking about out of doors to see that things were safe for the night, Hannah busied herself likewise inside, not forgetting (dear soul! it had been her nightly habit for years)

to go down into the cellar and sniff about to discover if a mischievous fire were under way by any sad chance.

When finally, "at peace with God and man," the old couple resigned themselves to slumber till the early dawn of a new day should stir them again, the moon, sailing by, paused to glance in at the open window of the little bedroom, and shed a silvery beam, like a benediction from above, upon the two gray heads which lay side by side, while the hand of the wife was safely nestled in the big, loving clasp of the husband's palm, and on both faces a happy smile was lingering.

Two weeks later Farmer Grey was again plodding home in the heat of a very warm afternoon.

This time he came from the village. Things had not gone smoothly with him there, and the result was that his usually sunny heart was clouded by a feeling of irritation which shut off the cheery whistle of his favorite song, and made the long walk more of a discomfort than it would perhaps have seemed to him otherwise.

In very truth the farmer was fast verging upon that state of mind called "snappishness." It seemed as though "he had never had sech a power o' things to rile him," and as though "the sun had never shone so 'tarnal hot on the airth sence he could remember."

He considered himself "nigh onto a fool to have gone an' lent his team" (to a neighbor), and caused himself to journey on "Shanks' mare," a miserable substitute, for a trip to the village and back on a midsummer day.

There was some excuse, after all, for the farmer's "out of sorts" on this occasion. He had felt several twinges of his old enemy, rheumatism, and he had been having an altercation with a neighbor at the post-office in which he had been worsted, and the post-office loungers had laughed at him, good-naturedly, of course, but none the less annoying to him. So he had stuffed his mail in his coat pocket, and started homeward in no very agreeable mood, as has been seen.

When the "half-way halt" was finally reached, he sank wearily down upon the cool gray rock, and bared his tired old head to the few tardy breezes about.

The landscape had no charms for him at this time—he was far too tired to admire anything; and beside, his thoughts were yet lingering a little angrily upon his recent word-conflict with the obstinate neighbor.

"I'd sell myself for a mule 'fore I'd be so sot in opinions!" he was thinking, busily pulling at the mote in his neighbor's eye, and forgetting the beam in his own. Presently he bethought him of the "mail," and he took it from his pocket, after ad-

justing the steel-bowed spectacles astride his nose, and settling himself comfortably back against the trunk of the big tree. There were two letters and the weekly paper.

One letter was addressed to his wife, and by the handwriting he knew it to be from her cousin, "Marthy Jane," who lived on a Western farm.

The farmer's countenance cleared itself of frowns as he beheld that letter.

"There, now, I'm glad! Mother, she'll be tickled to death when she gits this 'ere," he said; and back it went into the capacious pocket, where the newspaper had also been returned.

The other letter puzzled Farmer Grey somewhat. It bore the postmark of New York City, and the handwriting was entirely strange to him.

He opened it curiously and began to read. Various expressions flitted across his face as his eyes ran down the page, but the frowns were uppermost, and remained as he finally refolded the letter and put it slowly back in its envelope.

"Well, now!" said he, as though some one had been there to hear him. "I can't think why mother 'n' me sh'd be bothered with this 'ere sort of thing. Don't want to git mixed up with no sich work. Mother don't want to, nuther; leastwise, I dunno's she does—'n' I dunno as she *doesn't,* fer that matter. Mother's cur'us 'bout some things, an' she's easy put upon, mother is, ef I don't watch out

fer her consid'rable." Here a twinkle crept into his eyes, and the frowns vanished again.

"I dunno as I dast ter let Hanner ketch a sight o' this here letter, come to think on't. 'Twould like as not sorter work on them feelin's o' hern, fer mother, she's powerful sot on bein' good ter folks, an' she's gittin' on in years now, Hanner is. I must be kind o' keerful of her."

From a steeple somewhere in the village below came the faint, sweet sound of a bell ringing out the hour of five.

Eben arose and continued on his way up the mountain. Presently he was near enough home to hear the babble of the noisy brook which coursed along by the farm, and with the sound came also the tinkle of the cow-bells, as Tom drove them through the grassy lane above the mountain road. He heard something more, too, and that was the voice of "his Hanner," as she sang with unwonted energy the good old "Let us be joyful!" which betrayed the fact of her present contented spirit.

Eben smiled, and quickened his pace.

"Mother's goin' it agen," thought he. "Land alive, I wouldn't swap that woman for all the wives the village could give me. She's the nearest thing to a angel on airth that I ever see."

Hannah was standing at the kitchen door, on the watch for him as he emerged from the woods into the lane beside his house.

"I declare, father, ye do look completely tuckered," she said, coming forward to meet him. "Never mind; I've got some fresh water waitin' fer ye, an' I've been a-bakin' your fav'rite biskits fer supper." She looked at him anxiously. "What's the matter, Eben?" she asked, for she knew the "signs of the times," and a certain pucker of her husband's brow was plain enough signal for her that he had been "riled."

"Nothin' much," he replied, preparing for a souse in the basin of water. "Only Cy Jones an' me got ter talkin' as usual. Cy, he thinks there ain't a man alive knows half what *he's* forgot, an' his opinions are wuth all creation—to him. Can't say they be to me, though."

Hannah sighed and went back to her oven, leaving Eben to cool off his wrath in the clear spring water he was so fond of. But it was always a grief to the good woman when her husband and "that hot-headed Cy" came together in a war of words, though "Eben's upsotness never lasted long."

When the farmer came into the kitchen, his wife passed her hand caressingly through the scant gray locks on his forehead. "Come, husband, there's somethin' else a-troublin' ye, 'cept just that Cy Jones. I kin see it plain enough in your eyes. What on airth hev ye been up to?"

"Lor', mother," said he, with a smile that was like a burst of sunshine through the clouds, "'tain't a

mite o' use to try an' keep worriments from you. I ain't ever deceived ye, that I know of, sence we j'ined hands, an' I dunno as I'll begin now. Here!" He pulled the "mail" out of his pocket and handed her the letters.

"Better read that there fust"—pointing to the New York letter—"an' ye'll find out what's riled me so. Like as not you'll be riled too; leastwise, I know ye will if you're as sensible as I take ye to be."

But Hannah, with delighted eyes, dropped into the nearest chair and began to open the letter from her cousin.

"T'other one kin wait," she said. "I ain't so cur'us 'bout it that I'm goin' to let Marthy Jane's letter lay by fer it."

So while she pored over her letter, Eben settled himself in his big chair and watched her dear old face.

When she smiled over some especial item, he smiled too, and when she finally finished the last page, and looked up with an expression of excited interest, and an odd shine in her eyes, he was sure that she had news to read him.

"Wal', how's Marthy?" he asked. "She got red o' that newrolagy yet?"

Hannah nodded "Yes," at the same time turning her letter about as if in search of some particular item. "Jest listen to this, father," she said. "It's

the most interestin' part of the whole letter. Oh, here it is! She says—now listen, father—Marthy says: 'I can't tell you, Hannah, how I have been more than pleased at the result of my takin' a few poor leetle creeturs from the city, all along of what folks calls the Fresh-air Fund, an' turnin' of 'em out in green pasturs to romp an' play, an' see the fat fairly grow onto their leetle peaked faces! I felt I was a-doin' of my everlastin' duty to my feller-creeturs, so long as I had the space an' the medders to spare for 'em, an' it's give me a glad feelin' that's sot me right up.'"

Hannah looked up at her husband as she finished reading. Eben fidgeted in his chair, and looked somewhat surprised and annoyed.

"Isn't that a splendid idee, Eben?" asked Hannah.

"Dunno as 'tis," he answered.

"Why, father!" exclaimed his wife; "jest think of the happiness Marthy's a-feelin,' all fer doin' good to them poor leetle forlornities. Why, 'twarn't only jest t'other day I was a-readin' in the paper somethin' 'bout that kind o' work, but I never s'posed it'd come so nigh home as this letter tells me. I think it's a reely interestin' thing, an'—" She gave a little sigh, glancing over her letter once more. "I've got a sort o' envy 'bout Marthy, I reely have, father dear; an' I ca'nt help it—there, I can't."

The farmer removed his feet from the rungs of

his wife's chair, and brought his own chair, with a thud, down upon its four legs again. Then he arose and stretched himself.

"Wal', let's git down to supper, mother, ef yer a-calculatin' to eat any to-night, an' that other letter from York kin wait a spell, I reckon."

To himself he was thinking that the chances for his side of the subject and question contained in the New York letter were "a-goin' to be mighty slim, an' that mother an' him were goin' to have a diff'runce of opinions." Well, here's the letter which Hannah finally found time to read:

"NEW YORK, *July*, 18—.

"TO MR. EBENEAZER GREY.

"*Dear Sir:* We hear from the Rev. Mr. Jamison that he once passed a few nights under your hospitable roof. He tells us that you and your good wife have not only kindly natures, but are possessed of a fine farm most beautifully located.

"Under those circumstances you will pardon us if we hope for your coöperation in our plans for the benefit of the poor little city waifs who are in dire need of fresh air and sunshine, and whom we are sending to the country wherever kind hearts are willing to receive them. Will you, in plain words, receive a child from our society for two weeks?

"Hoping for a favorable reply, I am,

"Truly yours, JOHN GREEN,

"*Sec. of Children's Aid Society.*"

Hannah drew a very long breath when she finished this letter, and her eyes again sought her husband's.

"Wal', can't ye speak, mother?" he exclaimed.

She took off her spectacles and laid them on the table with the letter. Then she crossed the room and stood beside the farmer, her hands upon his shoulders, and a moisture in her brown eyes as she looked straight into his face.

"Eben, dear heart," said she, gently, "if this letter's what riled ye up so a spell back, why, then, I can't no way agree with ye, father, 'bout it. I can't help feelin' as Marthy feels, an', father dear, I want you to feel so, too."

Eben moved uneasily away, but the gentle hands followed and again rested upon his shoulder.

"Now, mother, what's the use!" exclaimed he, petulantly. "Ye know well 'nough that to hev that there boy'd be the upsottin' of all the comfort of your life. Ye don't consider, Hanner, that a youngster here'd be makin' a power of work an' muss for ye. I'm a-lookin' at the thing from a sensible p'int of view, an' you're lookin' at it from —t'other side. Besides, children — they — they is plagues, any way you can fix it!"

"Ours warn't, father"—softly.

"Ours were diff'rent; they'd been trained by—by you."

"'Tain't the fault of them poor city creeturs if

they ain't been trained. Why, Eben, half of 'em ain't got any folks belongin' to 'em, as Marthy says, an'——"

"Marthy knows a heap, don't she?"—sneeringly.

Hannah returned to her chair and sat down thoughtfully.

Eben stuck his hands in his pockets, and walked back and forth gloomily. Outside, amongst the trees, the low, sweet twittering of birds making ready for the nesting hour was heard like the melody of music, and the sounds stole softly in through the open door of the room where Hannah and Eben were silently nursing their differences of opinion. (Such an unusual state of affairs for Hannah and Eben, to be sure!) Finally, said Eben:

"Why don't ye go on talkin', wife? How long ye goin' to set there like a dumb critter? I can't say nothin' till you do, don't ye know that?"

Hannah smiled at that speech and its question.

"Why, Eben, dear," she answered, "I can't only say that I—I ain't the least mite riled at a blessed line that's in that city letter, an'—an' it would be dreadful hard work for me to try an' rile myself. I'd like to feel with you, father, if my conscience didn't go agen it, but I can't no way fix it so, reely, I can't."

"Wal', if you ain't no thought o' your own comfort, why, I've got to hev it fer ye," said Eben, half angrily, pacing the floor with his hands behind his

back, and his fingers nervously twisting in and out of each other.

"I ain't goin' to hev no city waif trompin', an' makin' hisself to home, an' walkin' clean over my wife's head, while I've got a hand to write 'no' to that there sekertery man."

He put the letter into his pocket, and went out without daring to meet the reproach he was sure Hannah's eyes would hold for his gaze.

After the evening chores were done, Farmer Grey filled his pipe and seated himself upon the old vine-covered porch for a comfortable smoke. Everything about him was sweet and peaceful under the influence of the hour.

The distant hills beyond the valley were covered with a tender, peaceful haze, which brooded, as well, over the pretty valley below. Perfume of dew-wet flowers and of fragrant fern and grass—that indescribable scent of the earth that one gets in the country when the dew begins to fall—was hovering around his senses, and the drowsy hum of insect-life, mingled with the sleepy twitter of the birds overhead, soothed the farmer's spirit and softened his feelings to thoughts which were most unlike those of an hour earlier.

Hannah was busy within doors, and Tom was finishing a few chores out in the barn. So Eben was left to his own thoughts for company, and they spoke to him plainly and wisely.

He had been noting with pride his fertile lands, and his thoughts led him back, along the years behind him, reminding him of all he had enjoyed both of comforts and prosperity. They whispered to him of his dear wife, and even of the little ones who had played about his knee, and whose resting place he could now see by the gleam of the white stone in the fading light below.

Somehow, with the thought of those little ones came a loving compassion for Hannah and her "whim," as he considered it. "She's only a woman, after all," he thought, "an' I s'pose she does kind o' hanker for somethin' or some one to mother a bit. But, sakes alive, I sh'd s'pose me an' Tom an' the cat were enough for one woman to take keer of, 'thout hankerin' for a young un that's jest out o' them city streets an' like to be a sight o' worry into the bargain."

He turned his head to see if Hannah were coming to sit with him awhile, and there she was at the window, re-reading her cousin's letter.

"Humph!" thought he, jerking himself around to get a better glimpse of her. "Like's not she's got holt of that air-fund item agen. Wal', wal', there ain't no 'countin' for some folks' taste!"

He turned his gaze upon the broad, beautiful meadow which faced him. It was once the favorite playground of his own little twins, and it seemed to the farmer now as though he could almost see their

active little forms running and leaping for joy, as they used to once on a time, and he fancied he could hear the shout of their happy voices, as the sound used to ring in his ears so long ago, when he sat smoking and resting after a busy day, in the peace of the twilight hour. Oh! the farmer's thoughts were excellent company for him, it would seem, for his pipe went out and he didn't know it. He simply sat there in the stilly hour and let those entertainers have their own way, and work their own sweet will with him, nor did he even remember to argue his own cause with his thoughts.

Presently Hannah came out beside him.

"Thinkin' 'bout somethin', father, ain't ye?" she asked. "Seems 's if I ain't see ye set so still at a time, I don't know when."

Eben took the hand that lay against his arm, and gave it a close pressure between his two big palms.

"I've been lookin' at that there medder, mother," he said, "an' it 'peared to me I could see little Eb an' his sister a-kitin' all over it like they used to, an' I declare, I believe I've done a power o' thinkin', sure enough."

He felt the clasp of her hand tighten a little, but she made no answer in words.

"What you been doin' yourself, my Hanner?" he asked.

"Clearin' away things, an'—an' I jest ran through Marthy's letter agen, an'—it's a mighty nice sort o'

letter, too. I'm glad she's quit of the rheumatiz, an' can enjoy havin' those poor leetle mites around her."

The farmer turned squarely around, and drew his wife upon his knee.

"There, now, Hanner," said he, half seriously, and yet with a twinkle in his eyes which she was quick to see, "this is a good time for us to settle matters about that there letter from York city. If you've got a decided notion 'bout the thing, I wish to the land you'd speak up an' free your mind, an'—an'—wal', I ain't no doubt but I might see it in—wal', I mean, I don't see no reason why we two can't agree about it, eh, mother?"

"I've been a-fightin' with my feelin's a long spell, Eben," answered Hannah, "for I'd ruther agree with you than not, you know I would; but somehow I can't think no way diff'rent but that it wouldn't do the least mite o' harm to you nor me, nor the farm, if we took one of them leetle creeturs for a short spell an' tried to chirk it up an' make it glad awhile. Now, Eben, if you talk a hundred years, I ain't goin' to have a diff'rent opinion than that."

Now we know that the farmer was pretty well prepared—owing to the half hour he had spent alone with thought—to come around to Hannah's way of thinking. But where is the man who likes to own himself convinced by a woman's argument?

No; he meant to throw down the walls of his defence, but there need be no special hurry for it, he decided. So he said presently, as he stretched his arms above his head and forced a loud yawn which he felt would make him appear indifferent to sentiment:

"Wal', what's to be done? Decide one way or t'other, Hanner, my dear."

She toyed with the strings of her apron nervously. "I decide, father? 'Tain't for me to decide."

"'Tain't, hey! Wal', I guess it consarns you a heap more'n me. We ain't had no children to pester us, nor interfere with our ways for so long, that it 'pears to me a young one under heels 'll be a pesky nuisance. An' you'll have your hands full, I can tell ye, old woman, an' git riled a hundred times a day, see if ye don't. Now, thinkin' it all over, the question is, What we goin' to do 'bout it?"

She pointed to the meadow. "Did you say you could a'most see Ebbie an' sis a-playin' there agen, father? Well, I wish—oh, Eben, how I wish we reely could see 'em! But, so long as we can't ever do that agen, wouldn't it be a good sight to be seein' some other leetle feller or leetle sis a-playin' away in the sun an' wind, an' a-tannin' an' fattenin' in a way to do 'em a power o' good? Seems like it's an awful pity to hev sich a lot o' space wastin' for leetle feet to play on it, father."

"Mebbe you're right, wife," said Eben, blowing his nose vigorously on the red handkerchief. "Mebbe you're right; ye most gener'ly are 'bout right. Come along, then, an' "—a humorous twinkle brightened his eyes—"while you're a-singin' 'Oh, be joyful!' like all possessed, I'll see what kind o' letter I kin git to the York feller; s'pose he's lookin' fer his answer 'bout now."

She put a hand on each of his cheeks, and gave him a hearty kiss, and they went in together.

From the corner cupboard Hannah presently took a bottle of ink and some sheets of blue-ruled paper. She deposited them, together with a scratchy pen—the best she could find—on the table before her husband. "Now, Eben, do be keerful 'bout your writin'. We want the gentl'm'n to see that we're eddicated, sensible folks. Oh, Eben, how good you are to me, my dear husband! Wait a minit, father. Are ye main *sure* you're willin' to hev the child?"

"Go 'long, mother! S'pose I warn't, 'twouldn't do no good, as I kin see, long's you're 'round a-coaxin' with them eyes o' yourn. Sho, now, mother, you've shook my arm an' made me blot! Give me 'nother sheet—there! Now go 'way, an' I'll hev it writ in no time."

After what seemed an age of waiting, Hannah listened with intense interest to the following lines:

ELLENVILLE, *July*, 18—.

"*Honored Sir:* I take my pen in hand to inform you that I got your letter. Me an' Hanner, we ain't useter children sence ourn died, a matter o' many years ago. Fust off we didn't feel as though we could be plagued with any o' your boys an' gals, but mother, she's sorter tender-hearted, an' she hankers fer the face of a child, she says; an' so, pervided ye send 'long a boy—I'd ruther hev him than a gal—ye kin do it, though I'm free to confess he'll likely be a dreadful plague. Ef he lies an' steals I'll lam him an' send him back. Ef he don't do nuther, we'll be good to him an' fatten him up an' sich.

"Yours to command, EBEN GREY."

"There, how's that, mother?" asked the farmer, as he leaned back in his chair and contemplated his handiwork. "That's fust rate, ain't it? Crickety! I dunno but we've been an' gone an' done it now, Hanner, old woman, an' got ourselves in a 'tarnal scrape, an' all 'long o' your hevin' sich tender feelin's."

Hannah laughed, and looked as if she would welcome the "'tarnal bad scrape" with open arms when it came.

"'Twon't turn out no scrape, father," she said, "but jest only a blessin'; an', anyway, we'll be doin' of our duty, an' Marthy Jane says there's where the good feelin' comes in."

Ten days later the farmer and Tom were putting old Dobbin in harness before the spring wagon, at about half-past nine on a beautiful morning.

Hannah was standing at the kitchen door, her face and heart as full of sunshine as the day itself.

"I dunno, Tom," whispered the farmer, as their heads and hands met in the arrangement of some part of the harness—"I dunno but what I'm makin' a mistake, after all."

Tom shook his head. "Naw; not a bit of it. Women folks allers knows best, Eben. Jerusalem crickets! hain't ye l'arned that much yet?"

"S'pose I'd orter, seein' 's I've been a merried man so long," replied Eben quizzically. Then he patted Dobbin's soft nose and walked over to where his wife was standing.

"Wal', mother," said he, "time enough fer ye to back out o' this 'ere consarn ef ye wanter. He'll likely spile yer garding patch, an' tromp dirt on yer clean floors, an'——"

"They'll only be leetle tracks, father," she interrupted, "an' easily washed outer sight."

"Wal', he'll pester ye dreadful, an' keep ye mendin' of him up all the time."

"I used to like mendin' leetle clothes," was the answer. "'Pears like I'll be glad to do it agen."

The farmer chuckled, and went on washing his hands, but he couldn't think of another argument to bring up on the subject of the expected guest,

so he allowed his wife the last word, and presently climbed over the wheel to the wagon seat, and gathered the reins in his hands.

"Good-by to ye, mother!"

"Good-by, father!" And Dobbin trotted gayly along the drive-way and out upon the road.

In a little while, when Hannah knew that her husband would have reached a certain stretch of road far down the mountain, she went out and stood upon a jut of the cliff overlooking the valley, and made ready to wave a white towel to him. It was a little custom of theirs to greet each other from that particular spot (which afforded the only glimpse of him she could catch along the road), and she knew he would be expecting her. So there she stood at the right moment, and Eben looked up and sent a loud "hello" back to her on the swift breezes, ere he turned off beyond the bend of the road.

"Now, when he comes back," thought Hannah, returning to her interrupted duties, "he'll hev the dear leetle creetur I've got sech motherly feelin's fer a'ready! Oh, the Lord is very kind an' good to me in givin' me sech a lovin', willin' husband. 'Tain't every man would hev give inter my whim so easy like."

. . . . . .

"Please, mister, where's a man named Mr. Grey?"

The farmer, who had been watching the emptying of the cars just arrived, and was wondering how he should pick out his own especial share of the human freight, turned at the sound of the shrill little voice and its question.

"Hello! I shouldn't wonder, now, ef you're the chap I'm lookin' fer," he said, good-naturedly.

"Are you Mr. Ebensneezer Grey?" repeated the boy.

"Ho-ho! ha-he-he-he!" laughed the farmer. "Wal', I dunno 's I kin be called much of a 'sneezer,' sonny, but I'm Ebenezer Grey to a dead certainty. An' you're the fresh-air-funder I'm a-lookin' fer, ain't ye?"

The boy nodded. "If you're lookin' fer a sierty boy, I'm the feller, sure pop," he added.

"Wal', where's yer baggage, sonny?" asked the farmer. "We'll git it an' go right along."

The boy grinned. "Here it is!" He clapped his hands to his ragged jacket and much-worn "knickerbockers," and stuck out his little feet, upon which were shoes two sizes too large for him. A shabby cap but half covered the profusion of curly golden hair on his well-formed head, and altogether he was a perfect specimen of the typical street Arab found in New York City.

"Sakes!" ejaculated Farmer Grey, gazing at the little figure which stood expectantly before him. "Ain't got no luggidge, hey? Wal', so much the

better; guess 'twouldn't 'mount to no gre't shakes ef ye had any. Come 'long!"

They walked around to the front platform of the depot, and there stood Dobbin, switching his long tail to keep the flies from his fat sides. He pricked up his ears at his master's step, and rolled an inquiring eye around at the little stranger; and the boy did impulsively just what warmed the farmer's heart to him as perhaps nothing else would have done so soon. He walked right up to the old horse, and reaching a pair of thin little arms, pulled Dobbin's head down and kissed the soft white nose lovingly.

Eben's face was one big smile of pleasure.

"Lor', now, ye ain't afeard nor nothin', an' ye love hosses! Wal', yer the kind of boy fer Ebenezer Grey, an' no mistake!"

He lifted the child to the wagon seat. "My, my! ye ain't no more heft'n a skeeter, hev ye?" he said, pityingly.

As they drove away, the boy, who had informed the farmer that his name was "Ben," was encouraged by Eben's face, and laid his little hands upon the reins.

"Le' *me* have 'em, can't I?" he asked, coaxingly.

Eben's bushy brows elevated themselves.

"Let you drive!" he exclaimed. "Massy sakes! 'tain't likely I want to git upsot, sonny. Dobbin'd

run away, with them hands o' yourn on the reins, most likely."

The boy's face wore a regular "street Arab" grin.

"This kind o' hoss don't run away," he said. "The hosses 'at run away 've got real grit in 'em; this'n's the poky kind!"

The farmer sat bolt upright. Was this little snipper-snapper criticising his horse, he'd like to know? Well, the youngster wasn't so far wrong in his opinion, Eben was forced to confess; and, come to think of it, he rather liked a plucky boy who wasn't afraid to express an honest opinion. So he laughed, and gave the reins into the little hands, and leaned back in his seat good-naturedly, pretending to be glad of the rest from driving, and thinking of the "long ago" when another little pair of hands used to try for the reins, and another little face (not so unlike the one now beside him) used to beam with the joy of the feeling of importance which comes to every little boy with his first handling of reins.

"This 'ere chap ain't no fool," thought the farmer—"not by a long shot; an' if he ain't enjoyin' of himself, I do' know who is!"

He watched the boy sitting straight as an arrow, the reins held at arm's length, and a look of complete content and self-complacency on the thin but pretty little face. Dobbin, jogging along steadily, may have known of the change of drivers, but

beyond the wagging of one ear now and then, he gave no sign of the knowledge.

"G'long!" shouted Ben, and slapped Dobbin's fat back with the reins impatiently. Dobbin switched his tail, and continued at the same gait as before.

"You must never urge a critter fast up a mounting, sonny," said the farmer. "If you're goin' to l'arn to drive, you must remember that 'ere rule."

"Can I drive lots while I'm here?" asked Ben.

"Shouldn't wonder," was the cheerful reply. "Ye'll l'arn right smart, I reckon, an' me an' mother 'll help ye have a good time if you're a good boy."

"Oh, I'll be good!" earnestly said Ben. "I promised the sierty I'd be good, an' I ain't the feller what goes back on his word. Mammy used to tell me that bein' poor wasn't so bad as bein' mean, an' bein' a liar was wuss'n all; an'—an'—" The little fellow's voice broke, but he manfully swallowed a lump in his throat, and chirruped to Dobbin gayly.

Eben saw it all; there was very little his keen blue eyes failed to see in regard to anything or anybody where his interests were aroused.

"When did your ma— Got any folks?" he said, altering his intended question in order to feel his way more gently.

"No folks since mammy died," was the reply.

"An' she died so long ago 'at I've growed big since then. She loved me very much, an' I loved her, you bet I did!"—emphatically. "An' it's been kinder lonely takin' care o' my own self, but I'm a-doin' it, all the same!"

"What! ever since mammy died?" queried Eben kindly.

"No; 'cause the folks put me in a 'sylum. But I wasn't sech a fool as to stay an' be treated like they treated us there, so I runned away one day, an' then I lived with some boys in a old man's cellar, an' when we didn't beg 'nuff to suit him, he licked us, an' some o' the fellers wouldn't stan' it, an' they lit out one day——"

"An' you——"

"Oh, I was one o' them fellers what couldn't stan' it, an' so I lit out, yer see."

"An' then?" Eben asked.

"Well, then I went fer the things I was big 'nuff to do, an' ran errants, an' looked out fer jobs, yer know, an' folks called me, an' other fellers like me, 'wafes.' I ain't never quite knowed what wafes is, but guess it's boys what lives 'round in spots like we do. Well, an' then the sierty foun' us, an' we was all glad when we foun' we was a-goin' in the country. I seen a picture oncet, in a store windy, an' there was a big medder with daisy flowers and yaller posies a-growin' on it, lookin' like they was as'in' us to walk up an' pick 'em. Didn't I jes' want ter, though!"

"Poor leetle sonny!" said the farmer compassionately. "I'm goin' to let you play all day long in a big medder, an' the pretty posies around are jest beggin' fer a little chap like you to come an' pick 'em!"

Ben's eyes sparkled, and he dropped the reins in his eager desire to clap his hands. Eben picked them up, and giving Dobbin a touch with the whip, bade him "hurry and git fer home!" while Ben was content to sit quietly beside the farmer, and drink in, through eyes and parted lips, the delicious charm of scene and air, and could hardly realize that he was to be comfortable and happy and well-cared for for two whole glad summer weeks!

"Smells awful sweet an' nice here!" presently he said to Eben, sniffing with his diminutive nose in every direction. "Feels awful good, too!" he added; and a long-drawn breath followed, as though words could never express his happy feelings, and there was no use in his trying to make them.

"Ye won't be lonely none, sonny, will ye?" questioned Eben. "Won't hanker after them city noises an' smells?"

"Huh!" sneered Ben. "I rather guess not. I ain't a-wantin' the city nor nothin' in it—'cept—'cept only one thing, an' that's my little pup dorg. I'll be kinder glad to see him agen!"

"How'd you come by a pup?" asked Eben, astonished.

"Why, you see, he follered me one day, an'

wouldn't be driv off. An' I hided him in my cellar, an' the fellers what lived there too, they said they'd look out fer 'im; but I s'pose he'll be dead 'fore I get home."

"Why didn't you bring the critter 'long?" asked kind-hearted Eben; and the boy explained that the "sierty folks wouldn't let him."

"Sho!" exclaimed Eben, "that was dreadful foolish of 'em; ye could have brung the critter well as not. Never mind, Ben; there's a cat to home, an' you can play she's a dog; don't believe she'll mind bein' one, to oblige ye."

Just then a team appeared around a bend of the road, and the farmer held up at the narrow pass to make room for the neighbor, who nodded cordially as he drove by, and said:

"Got a visitor, I see."

"Only an experiment, neighbor," laughed Eben in return; and as they went their ways, Ben looked up into his new friend's face and asked:

"Say, mister, what's a 'speriment?"

"A small boy brung from the city to plague the life out a poor old man an' his Hanner," jokingly answered Eben, looking down with twinkling eyes into the blue ones lifted to meet his gaze.

"Yer mean me? I ain't goin' to plague no one, mister, an' if I ain't good, yer can sen' me home, 'cause the sierty said so, an' I don't want to go home."

"Wal', then, sonny," chuckled the farmer, "the experiment's bound to turn out good fer all hands 'round. See that there red roof stickin' out o' the trees yonder?" pointing with his whip in the direction of the farm. "Wal', there's your home, sonny, for two whole weeks, an' you're as welcome as the sunbeams that's waitin' to play with ye."

Ben widened his eyes, fidgeted on the stout leather seat under him until he nearly slipped off from it, and looked eagerly at the red roof, which increased in size with Dobbin's trot.

Eben slackened the reins, and thought within himself, as he leaned back and looked at Ben:

"I declare, I b'lieve I'm a-feelin' like Marthy. I do reely think Hanner'd be surprised if she see how much I'm feelin' like Marthy this minute. The poor leetle thin, peaked feller! Lor' sakes! I came nigh bein' the meanest critter on this airth, an' mother, she saved me. She's a powerful sensible woman."

A few moments more, and Dobbin turned in at the farm-yard gate and stopped before the porch where Hannah stood with beaming countenance.

Before the farmer could drop the reins over the dashboard, Ben stood up in the wagon, took a survey of his surroundings, and sprang out over the wheel nearest him into the soft, fragrant grass, where he rolled and revelled in delight too intense for speech.

"Land alive!" said Hannah in what she intended

to be a whisper, "I dunno's I've ever see a peakeder leetle creetur than him. Bless his heart! look at him now, father. Does seem's if he ain't goin' to quit smellin' o' that grass, the poor leetle feller!"

Eben slapped Dobbin's fat side, and the old horse started on to the barn, where Tom awaited him.

"Don't go to makin' too much o' the boy, mother," said the farmer, "fer I kin tell ye he ain't no cry-baby 'bout hisself. He's smart as a steel trap, he is, an' 'cute enough ter take advantage of too much sp'iling now, mind I tell ye."

Hannah shook her head indignantly.

"Don't tell *me,* Eben Grey. A man can't tell a woman how to treat a mite like that there boy. I tell you he's a-pinin' fer love an' kisses, an' if he don't git 'em right here 'long of us, why, my name ain't Hanner, an' I ain't been mother ter two lovin' children like ourn long ago."

She stepped forward with arms outstretched, and a smile on her face which would have won a much less loving little heart than Ben's.

"Come right here, dearie," said she, as the child at last stood up and pulled his shabby little jacket into position.

"Ben, this is mother," said the farmer.

Ben's eyes opened wide. "Why, is she your mother?" he questioned in surprise. "She don't look anywhere near as old as you do!"

Both the farmer and his wife laughed heartily at that.

"How'd you s'pose the child was goin' to know 'bout it?" she asked Eben. Then turning to the wondering boy, she explained between her chuckles:

"You see, dearie, long ago—oh, very long ago—I was mother to two leetle children that died when they was 'bout your age. Let's see, how old be you, anyway?"

Ben promptly answered that he was "ten goin' on 'leven."

"Well, my leetle ones was twins, an' we loved 'em, oh, so dearly! We're goin' to love you, too, Benny, first fer yer leetle self, an' next—'cause ye've got the last part o' my leetle Eb's name. He was Eben, an' you're Ben without the *E* part. An'—oh! I was goin' ter tell ye—husband he calls me 'mother' 'cause the children did, an' I call him 'father' fer same reason, an' you kin call him 'Uncle Eb,' an' me, 'auntie,' if yer a mind ter. There! now we've got it all fixed up, ain't we? An' father 'n' me, we've got a nice leetle boy come ter stay with us an' love us, an' grow fat an' strong as good feed'll make him. Now ain't ye got a kiss fer me, Benny?"

The boy's little heart responded readily to the kind smile and tone, and he ran into the motherly arms extended for him, and lifted his thin face for the warm kiss Hannah's lips were so willing to bestow.

The good woman's tears were perilously near to flowing as she felt the clasp of the little arms about her neck while she knelt to receive the caress.

How long, ah, me! how long since the kiss of a little child had thrilled her heart!

The farmer turned aside and blew a resounding blast upon the ever-handy silk "han'kercher," and drew the back of his hand across his eyes. Then he walked over to the barn, and presently called out:

"Say, mother, do ye s'pose I could find a boy anywhere 'round these parts 't would like ter lead Dobbin to the brook fer water?"

The twinkle in his eyes got also into his voice, and Hannah laughed to see Ben's eyes shine eagerly, as he sped from her arms in the direction of the barn.

"The water-trough's full," said Tom from the harness-room; "ain't no need ter take the hoss——"

"Shet up, Tom!" was the farmer's reply, with gruff good-nature; "don't ye see I'm sorter mernooverin' to give the boy a good time right off, an' break him in to likin' his new hotel?"

Tom giggled and kept his mouth "shet," according to advice, and Ben presently went off to the brook leading the horse, who glanced indulgently down at the pygmy at the other end of the halter, and had his own opinion of the proceeding.

"The boy ain't washed nor nothin'," said Hannah,

as she and Eben stood watching their happy little guest, "an' his face an' hands are dreadful s'iled."

"Ye kin clean him up fer dinner," was the reply. "An' mother, ef I was you I'd see ef there ain't some of our Eb's leetle togs that'll fit the boy, 'cause all the luggidge he's got is on him this minit."

"Didn't the sassiety fit him out with no extries?" she asked in surprise. "Ain't he got a night-shirt nor nothin' ter put on him to-night?"

"Nothin'!" was the laconic reply, and Hannah looked anxious.

"Lory me'! I'll hev ter run right up attic this minit an' see what I kin find; though you know, father, I give away most of Eb's things to Mis' Blake when she was left a widder an' hadn't a blessed thing to git clothes fer her child. Well, I've got a leetle night-gownd there, anyhow, an' I'll see what else."

"Hold on, mother; dinner fust! Ben an' I'm as hungry as bears."

So Hannah bustled about, and the "Oh, be joyful!" was never more joyfully sung, I'm sure, than during that noon hour, when she paused at least a dozen times in the preparations for dinner to stand at the door and watch Ben playing in the sunny meadow, and to realize more and more the delightful fact that there was a child once more on the old farm, and under her motherly care. So sur-

prising and glad a thing to have happened to her! And oh, what news to put into her letter to "Cousin Marthy Jane"!

After Benny was snugly tucked in his trundle-bed that night (the little trundle-bed which had been put away with other "useless" things so long ago, amid Hannah's tears and sad memories, when it had seemed to her as though her heart would surely break for its yearning after her buried treasures), she went downstairs to find her husband.

He had come in from the barn, and was sitting, as usual, with his beloved pipe, under the vines in the hush of the twilight hour.

She drew her chair close beside him, and laid her hand in his.

"Our children would have been glad to have had Ben come, if they were here to-night, wouldn't they, father dear?" she asked.

Eben chuckled silently, and Hannah looked at him in surprise.

"For the land's sake, mother!" said he. "I don't mean to hurt your feelin's, but—but I can't help thinkin' there'd been consid'rable diff'runce in the ages of this 'ere city waif an' them children of ourn. Seems's though you 'most forgit they'd be growed up man an' woman by now, ef they hadn't been took away."

"Oh, deary me! so they would, Eben, so they

would, an' I do forgit 'bout that. Seems 's if I can't make 'em out to be no bigger'n them leetle mounds down yonder. Dear, dear! how time does fly by!"

She let her eyes wander valleyward, and her husband saw the wistful look which always told the secret of her sad thoughts, begin to steal over her face.

"Come, mother," he said cheerily, to call her back from the "auld lang syne"—"come, tell me 'bout Ben, and how'd you manage ter fix him off fer the night, an' how'd he like it, hey?"

Hannah's face brightened immediately.

"Well, father, he was just as 'cute an' sweet as he could be. Why, talk of his goin' on 'leven, as he said awhile back, ye know; it turns out he only got ter be ten last week, an' he says the other leetle fellers give him ten slaps for his buthday, jest in fun, ye know. They was the boys who lived in the cellar with him; they was bootblacks an' newsboys an' sich, an' he says they paid a man two cents a night fer lettin' of 'em sleep there on some straw; an' Benny he did odd jobs 'bout the streets, an' airnt some money in that way. But, oh, father, if ye'd seen how he liked the bath I made him take in the biggest wash-tub! He said it was fine, 'cause he hadn't had a bath for so long. He said he an' the fellers useter go down an' jump off the docks an' swim, an' dry their clothes an' theirselves in the sun. I don't see what on airth kep' 'em from gittin' drownded, do you?"

"Like as not there's special angels pervided by the good Father in heaven, to watch out an' take keer o' them leetle city strays as ain't got no one else to do it," replied Eben, reverently.

"Well, an' father, that leetle night-gownd of Ebbie's fit Ben to a T, an' he looked too cunnin' in it, he's sich a mite fer his age, an' his goldeny hair it was all tousley, an' his big blue eyes they was as nigh Ebbie's as two peas in a pod, an' there! I couldn't help it. I jest sot down an' cried, part fer joy an' part fer—fer our own babies. I reely did!"

Eben's big fingers closed with a tender pressure on the hand that lay within his.

"An' when he was cuddled down in bed," continued Hannah, "he jest lifted them little thin white arms o' his, an' ketched me 'round the neck an' pulled my face 'longside o' his, an' he hugged me —well, there! even Ebbie an' sis couldn't hev hugged me no harder. An' says he: 'Auntie Hanner,' says he, 'I love you an' my Uncle Eb like sixty, an' I'm goin' to be good every single day, an' I'm awful sorry fer ye fer losin' that leetle boy an' gal that was twins!' Well, father, I never felt so drawd to a leetle stranger that warn't no kin to me, in all my life before! An' at last, soon as I could dast to speak, fer I was dreadful 'feard I was goin' to hev another spell o' tears, says I to Ben: 'I hope, Benny,' says I, 'that you're useter sayin' yer prayers, like good leetle boys always oughter;' an' says he:

'I don't hev much chance fer sayin' 'em now, but I useter when mammy was livin'. The fellers 'd laugh at a chap as says his prayers, so I kinder forgot 'em.' An' then, father, he said: 'I ain't goin' to forgit no more, Auntie Hanner; an' there ain't a feller kin say I ever stealed a penny, nor that I tell lies, an' no cop ever ketched me a-doin' a thing to be jailed fer!' I asked him what a 'cop' was, an' it'd done your heart good to 'a' heard him laugh an' shout at me. An' then he told me. Lor', I never s'posed p'licemen was called sich names as that.'

Eben grinned. "Ef he keeps on, mother, he'll l'arn ye all the street ways, an' ye'll be able ter visit ter York city an' make yerself ter home soon!"

"Well, all I kin say is that I'm powerful happy to-night, an' I think I've got the best an' kindest man fer a husband that ever a woman had in the world!"

Later, when Eben and his wife were ready to retire for the night, they went together softly to look at the little guest beneath their roof.

The pretty but thin little face looked pitifully wan in sleep, and the golden-brown lashes lay thickly against cheeks which Eben determined in his heart should round out before a week went by, "ef he had to stuff 'em like sassige skins."

The little lips were parted, and now and then a smile crept about the corners.

"I'll bet a cookie," whispered Hannah, "he's dreamin' of the good time he's had this afternoon, an' the good dinner we gave him into the bargain!"

She wanted to kiss him out of the fulness of her pitying heart, but Eben drew her back.

"Better not resk wakin' of him," he advised in a whisper, and they tip-toed to their own little room adjoining.

"Ain't it nice, father," whispered Hannah, "to hev a little child here a-dependin' on us fer love an' keerful lookin' after?"

Eben closed the door softly; then he turned around and looked at Hannah with a twinkle in his eyes which she always loved to see.

"Want me ter tell ye a secret, mother?" he asked; "an' ef I do, ye won't laugh nor poke no fun at me, hey? Wal', then, I'm about as nigh ter feelin' like Marthy Jane as—as you was the day you read her letter 'bout them there children she'd been takin'. Now, don't laugh, mother, 'cause I'm tellin' ye the truth, an' I'm free ter confess as I've been 'shamed o' myself fer goin' agen ye in the fust place."

"Don't say a word, father, don't say a word!" replied Hannah, her eyes filling as she spoke, and they both stood still in the clasp of each other's arms for a moment.

Days went by, and little Ben was fast learning new lessons in the book of life. His "street-Arab"

ways were departing rapidly, and gentler manners grew upon him. Still there was plenty of "boy-romp" in him yet, and there were shoutings and racings in "the old medder" which gladdened the ears of the farmer and his wife over and over again.

After half a day of hiding under the barn floor, the cat had ventured out for her noon-day meal, and Hannah had introduced her pet to Benny.

Puss need not have been afraid of the new-comer, for Ben had too tender a little heart to be what is called an "animal stoner." But a little teasing now and then, he argued with Tom, would not hurt anybody or anything, and therefore he did not delay in giving to pussy her first lesson in walking with her dainty feet in paper bags.

She didn't approve of it at first, nor did she like the set of harness Ben manufactured for her.

"Aunt Hanner" didn't approve, either, and her cheerful face looked troubled when Ben first began his fun.

But the boy's ready "I won't do it, auntie, if you don't want me to; only, really an' truly it don't hurt puss a bit," always mollified her; and as Eben only laughed, and sometimes helped Ben to turn puss into a horse and teach her to draw the little wagon about the yard, till she became quite accomplished at it and seemed to like to show off, it happened as a matter of course that "auntie" soon set the tricks

down to count as fresh evidence of her dear boy's "'cuteness."

And when one day Benny called her to come and look at a "cirkiss 'formance," and she beheld her once staid old cat jumping friskily back and forth through the circle made by Ben's arms, and turning actual somersaults on the grass at the boy's command, her surprise was too great for words, until at last—

"Well, I never saw the beat of that! Why, Benny, you're a reg'lar wonder; there! you reely are!" she cried.

"Go beg for milk now," ordered Ben, his face one big, delighted grin; and the obedient cat walked up to Hannah and gravely stood on her hind legs, with her forepaws gracefully waving up and down.

Hannah screamed with laughter, and Eben came running from the barn at the unusual noise.

"Oh, father, oh, dear! I certainly *shall* give up!" she said. "I never s'posed our old cat was so much of a kitten. Ben'll be makin' babies o' you an' me, father, if we don't look out."

"She ain't half as smart as my Dick," exclaimed Ben.

"Who's Dick? I ain't heard 'bout Dick. Is he another leetle waif like you?" asked Aunt Hannah.

Ben giggled. "Yes'm, he's a wafe, too, but he's the kind what goes on four legs 'stid o' two like fellers. He useter live 'round in spots same's I did,

till I foun' him, an' now he lives with us boys in the cellar."

So the story of Dick was related to Hannah, and the kind-hearted woman telegraphed a thought to the farmer, as he stood looking on, his pipe in his mouth and his thumbs in the armholes of his vest.

But he telegraphed back the reminder that if Dick were sent for the cat might not be so happy as she now was, and so, unfortunately, poor Dick, the "yaller pup," lost his chance to be also a "fresh-air-funder" like his little master.

Later on the farmer again cautioned his wife not to "sp'ile the boy," and she retorted that she "reckoned ef anybody sp'iled him 'twould be himself, fer she never see a man so tickled to pieces as he was whenever Ben was a-coaxin' fer anythin'." And then they both laughed and gazed at the "bone of contention," who at that moment was riding Dobbin about the dooryard, his merry face toward the switching tail, and his little legs sprawled apart on the animal's round, plump sides.

"Well, there," continued Hannah, "all I've got to say is that if we'd 'a' died an' left our twins poor leetle orfins like Benny, I'm sure we'd been truly thankful to any one who'd 'a' made fresh-air-funders out of 'em, an' sent 'em where they'd been keered fer as we're keerin' fer Ben."

"That's so, mother," agreed Eben, dropping into his broad old chair and drawing his wife upon his

knee. "But, see here, we mustn't be gittin' too fond o' the boy. He's been here three or four days, ye see, an' his time's gittin' kinder short. If we love him too much I'm afeard we'll miss him bad when he goes, hey, mother?"

Hannah started. "Oh, dear! I can't bear to think o' that jest yet, father; don't let's talk 'bout it."

She sat there on his knee, passing her hand to and fro amongst the silvery locks on his head; but her thoughts were wandering, and silence reigned, until presently the farmer took his pipe from his lips, laid it upon the table beside him, and looked at his wife.

"Ain't ye never growed tired o' lovin' your old man in all the years we've been together, my Hanner?" finally asked Eben, putting his arm more closely and tenderly about her waist and giving her a hug.

She looked fondly into his eyes. "True lovin' never gits tired, father," she said; "an' as you've been the same man I took ye to be when I first promised to love ye—always the same man, Eben, dear—why shouldn't I have gone on lovin' ye the same?"

"Dear heart, God grant it may be so till the end of our days, an' then, when one of us goes, I hope He'll jest take t'other along same time," gravely Eben answered; and the two faces for a moment were fondly laid side by side against the cushioned chair-back.

"Somehow," said Hannah, presently, "I feel as if there's a special blessin' a-restin' on you an' me, Eben, fer takin' that poor lamb into the fold o' this 'ere home of ours. I can't but feel that we'll always be glad for sharin' with him some o' the comforts we had an' to spare. Now, don't laugh, father, but I mean it reely."

"Lor' bless your soul, who's a-goin' to laugh? Not I. I'm comin' round more an' more like Cousin Marthy; an' I guess things is about right as they be."

. . . . . .

And now more days had passed, until already one full week of Ben's "fortnight" had slipped out of sight.

How happy he had been no one knew better than the old barn with its beams and its hay-lofts, its grain-scattered floor, and even the hens who had been so often startled from their "stolen nests," and sent shrieking from the lofts down to the floor and out through the wide doors; and the grand old woods whose trees, with their accommodating boughs, had kept Hannah's willing hands patching little jacket and trousers full often enough; and the babbling, noisy, racing brook, scurrying along under the trees by the farmyard gate; and the tiny minnows which had laughed at the bent pin and piece of string with which the boy had tried to induce them to have change of scene and air;

and the old meadow, full of clover and fragrant grasses, where Benny had rolled and revelled in the wealth of sunshine and sweet breezes until he had been turned from white to brown, and the little limbs had grown fat and sturdy enough to suit Eben and Hannah well. How many "good long drives"

BENNY IN THE MEADOW.

had the child taken with Eben, to and from the village and thereabouts, with Eben as passenger and Ben as driver! There had been a visit also, soon after Ben's arrival at the farm, to the village tailor, and a "Sunday go-to-meetin'" suit had been the result, and a very proud, high-headed boy had marched up the aisle of the good old Congregational

church with Eben and Hannah on the very first Sunday after.

Such a happy week as had passed, Ben knew he had never had before in his little life, that his memory could recall, at any rate. And to think that only one more remained!

When he stopped long enough from busy play (and from helping Tom with such chores as his little hands could attend to) to think how fast time was skimming along, he grew very thoughtful and serious, and looked wistfully about him on the beautiful scenes he would have to leave. He hated to remember the city streets, his discomforts, and his hungry days and sleepless nights. He didn't care for "the fellers" either, and the only ray of comfort he had in the thought of going back was the hope that his "yaller pup" might not be dead or lost.

But then, after all, Benny hadn't much time to worry over the future when the present was still so glad a time, and so he kept on growing well and strong and "brown as a berry," and whistled and sang and teased and coaxed, and loved Hannah and Eben more and more with every hour that he was with them, until one evening, when Hannah had kissed him good-night and left him well *en route* for the "Land o' Nod," she suddenly remembered that but four more days remained to her of her loving care of Benny, and but four more of

those sweet good-night kisses from his dear little lips.

"Oh, how can I bear the loneliness to come!" she thought. "An' how ever will I git along without the noise of a little child about the place?"

She felt a trembling all over her limbs and a weight of pain in her heart as she went straight to the little sitting-room, where Eben was filling his pipe for a quiet smoke on his favorite porch.

He, too, had been thinking of Ben; indeed, he had been doing that for some days before, and had congratulated himself upon having arrived at a very sensible conclusion, and that was, that "he an' his Hanner had done the best they could for the leetle feller, an' fattened him, an' browned him, an' turned him out to grass same as other leetle lambs liked to be; an' now that it was nigh onto time fer him to be a-leavin' for York agen, mebbe it was jest as well 'twas so, for if he'd been goin' to stay longer, like as not he an' mother would 'a' growed tired o' the bargain," etc. Thus Eben reasoned with his heart, and because he knew that his heart didn't accept the argument, but was constantly turning it upside down, Eben was feeling quite uncomfortable over the mental conflict. As he filled his pipe, his cheek yet felt the pressure of the childish kiss of "good-night" from his small guest, and the words, "I jes' love you, Uncle Eb!" which had accompanied an ardent squeeze from Benny's

young arms, were yet sounding in the farmer's ears, and causing a smile to linger both around his mouth and in his kind blue eyes.

At that moment Hannah entered, and Eben saw that there was something troubling her.

"What is it, mother?" he asked, although he easily guessed what her reply would be.

She came close, and putting her arms about his neck, dropped her face against his shoulder.

"Oh, Eben, I love him so!" she said, with just the suspicion of a sob in her voice.

"Wal', that's right, mother; so ye do, an' so do I, but there ain't no call to cry 'bout that, is there?"

"N-o-o, Eben, but—but there's only four days more, an'—oh, father dear, ain't it goin' to be dreadful lonesome fer you 'n' me when that blessed little lamb's gone off the farm?"

Eben patted the gray head with his brawny hand as tenderly as though he had been soothing a child.

"Lor', yes, mother, we're bound to miss Ben for a spell. But there! we'll git used to missin' of him, same as—as we had to git used to missin' them two we loved better'n we love Benny, you know."

"Oh, Eben, dear heart, couldn't we keep him jest one more little short week? Seems 's if I couldn't noway on airth spare the boy so soon, reely."

She lifted her troubled dark eyes to Eben's gaze, and he bent his head and put a tender kiss upon them.

"We must think it over, Hanner, wife; 'tain't a thing we can decide on to once. Cheer up, an' wait till them four days is gone, an' like as not ye'll be glad to git red o' Ben by then. Ye're lookin' sort o' tuckered out lately, an' I make no doubt but you've had too much pesterin' from Ben to agree with ye."

She shook her head. "'Tain't pesterin' from Benny that's tuckerin' me," she said, as she took a little pair of trousers from the chair and sat down to put a patch on the knee of one leg—"'tain't that dear boy, Eben, but it's the pesterin' of my feelin's, an' they've been a-doin' of it fer a sight o' time, seems to me."

Eben laughed, finished filling his pipe, and stepped out upon the porch, and Hannah heard presently the thud of his chair-back against the side of the house as he tilted it in his usual fashion, and lifted his feet to the railing opposite.

She sighed, and mournfully fitted the patch to the jagged hole in the little trousers knee.

"He's only jest a man, an' he don't know; no, he don't know as I do. Bein' only a man, he can't know," she thought. And now and then a mist came between her eyes and her work, and she had to brush it aside in order to proceed, and the work progressed very slowly.

Outside there was a wealth of starshine, and Eben watched the "sky-lamps," and smoked, and tried to think of everything but the one subject of the little waif, to which, in spite of all, his heart yet clung.

. . . . . .

It was noon of the day before "Benny's last" (as Hannah called it sorrowfully), when the farmer, with the boy at his side and numerous store packages at his feet, drove in through the big side gate, and cheerily called: "Here we be, mother!"

Hannah appeared at the kitchen door with her head tied up in a towel, and her hands white with flour, just as she had taken them from the dough, for it was "bakin' day."

Dear old face! It was full of the sunshine of the loving greeting of her heart for her beloved husband, and he knew it would be there for him always, whether his absences were long or short.

"Had a nice ride, Benny?" she asked, taking her ample apron by the corners and lifting it up to receive the parcels which Ben tossed in, one by one.

"Bully!" shouted the boy, returning to street-Arab parlance for the sake of especial emphasis. "An' auntie, say, I driv nearly all the way to the mill, too, an' Uncle Eb says I'm a boss driver now. I'm awful hungry; wisht we could have dinner soon!"

"Bless your dear little heart! there's cookies

a-plenty if ye can't wait a short spell for dinner," the woman replied, beaming lovingly on the child she would have to part from on the morrow.

Eben delivered Dobbin into the hands of Tom —who came whistling from the field beyond, and was, like Benny, conscious of inward cravings for the dinner—and went at once to the basin of cool water prepared for him already by Hannah.

First he had his good time "coolin'-off," and then Ben took his turn, wishing with all his heart that "Aunt Hanner'd jes' let him plunge once in the big rain-water barrel where a feller'd have a chance fer splashin' good!"

Eben, making sure that the child was not present, took a letter from his pocket and tossed it on the table before Hannah. She looked up, all the sunshine gone from her face as she met his eyes.

"They've sent for Ben?" she asked.

He nodded, and sat down at the window while she read the letter. Ben, in the shed outside, rubbing his cheeks with the crash towel, caught the man's eyes, and winked his own blue eye roguishly, as though to say: "Didn't we have a jolly time!" And Eben wondered to himself how it would seem after that merry little face had departed from the old farm.

He looked at Hannah. She was folding the letter slowly, and her face was sad, so sad that Eben got up and laid his hand on her shoulder kindly.

"Never mind, mother, never mind; we'll be glad we've had him for two hull weeks 'tanyrate."

"But they're goin' to send him 'way out West, Eben," she said, "an' we won't be able to have him next summer, in case we—in case we'd been thinkin' on it, ye see, father."

There was a wistfulness in face and tone which went to the man's tender heart.

"Why, mother, I wasn't dreamin' ye keered so much 'bout the boy! Why, there's plenty o' leetle duffers a-lyin' 'bout the streets loose, an' ye can have one any time, ye know, an' like 's not they'd be jest as nice as Ben, come to try 'em."

Hannah sighed and shook her head. "No boy'll ever tetch my heart as little Benny does," she replied. "But there, father, I ain't a-goin' to pester ye with my silly feelin's no more. We've had a nice time with Ben, an' now if he's got to go, he's got to, an' there's all there is about it." She smiled through the tears that had persisted in welling up from her troubled heart, and brushed them away briskly, lifting her face to meet the kiss she saw was ready for her on her husband's lips. Then:

"When'll you write the letter to tell 'em 'bout the train?" she asked. "Make it the latest one you can, won't you, Eben? Oh, deary me! Well, we'll have dinner right off, father dear. I know ye must be pipin' hungry."

While she hurried about her preparations, the farmer walked down the lane to the barn, and seeking a shadowy corner, sat down on the tongue of the hay-cart for a "quiet bit of a think." He stooped and gathered some wisps of hay from the floor, and began chewing their ends absently, after his manner when in thought.

The pigeons above him looked down from their high perches, and cooed to each other that the farmer seemed troubled. The hens and the stately-stepping roosters lazily scratched over the grain about the barn floor, and kept up a constant clucking and argument after the manner of their kind. Soft, sweet breezes flitted in and out between the wide-open doors back and front, and stopped every now and then to play with the loose gray locks on the man's forehead, as he chewed his straws and fixed his eyes on vacancy, while devoting his thoughts most seriously to a subject which had somehow taken unexpected possession of them.

Presently a shadow fell upon the barn floor, and Eben lifted his eyes to see Tom approaching with his arms full of newly cleaned harness.

"Come here, Tom," beckoned Eben; and presently, after a few whispered words, Tom started back, and the harness fell to the floor with a great noise of straps and buckles.

"Ye ain't, now, reely, Eben?" he exclaimed.

"Wal', I be, too!" was Eben's reply. "An' all I

ask of ye, Tom, is jest to keep your mouth shet on it. Hear ?"

"Loddy, loddy!" said Tom, picking up his harness and shaking with laughter, in spite of the surprise still plainly written on his face. "What on airth'll Hanner say ?" he continued, as he entered the harness closet and hung each article in place.

"H'm! don't know, an' don't keer!" grumbled Eben.

"Come, father," just then called Hannah, standing at the kitchen door; "dinner's a-waitin'. Call Tom an' come."

"Come 'long, Uncle Eb!" shouted a shrill little voice, as Ben scampered around the corner of the house and hurried to escort the farmer from the barn.

Eben laid his hand on the little golden head and patted it; then they went to dinner, and the clattering of knives and forks began. Ben and Tom were the only lively eaters of the party, for Hannah's appetite had all of a sudden departed, and Eben "didn't hanker for his vittles as much as he'd s'posed he was goin' to."

Consequently the meal was not long in finishing, and very soon Hannah was as busy in the "clearing away" as she had been in preparing her dishes.

Eben meanwhile polished his spectacles, and got out his writing materials, for, as he told Hannah, "it was necessary to send the reply to the sassiety right away."

"You won't forget to make it as late as possible 'fore the child's got to go, father?" reminded Hannah from the kitchen sink-room, where she was washing dishes.

"That's all right, mother," from Eben; and then, in a few moments, "Mother!" he called.

"Well, father, what's wanted?"

"I ain't heard ye singin' your favorite tune lately; y' ain't tellin' us to 'be joyful' no more. What's come over ye, Hanner?"

She appeared at the doorway, dish and towel in hand, and a look of intense reproach on her face.

"Why, Ebenezer," she exclaimed, "it does seem 's if you ain't a mite o' feelin' 'bout Ben's goin', or you never in this world could *expect* me to be a-singin' as I do when I'm reel happy at my heart. How on airth could I feel joyful when that blessed lamb, that the Lord—I ain't a mite o' doubt but He did it a-purpose—sent here straight out o' them wicked p'ison streets, so's we could keep his little soul inside 'im all white an' clean, same as though he was our very own—when he's a-goin' away agen, an' has got to be sent 'way out West all alone, poor boy, 'mong strangers that'll like as not be cross with him for his little playful ways? Why, Eben, I don't see what *does* possess you!"

She turned and went back to her dish-washing, and Eben, after a series of inward chuckles, called out sweetly:

"Lors-a-massy, mother, I've got feelin's enough; but if you don't sing out joyful like, an' let me see that you're happy, why, *I* ain't happy, that's all. Ben ain't gone yet; hear him a-shoutin' out there like fun! An' if I was Hanner Grey, 'pears to me I wouldn't try to cross no bridges till I come to 'em. Like as not—I say, like as not—Ben'd grow sassy byme-by, an' tarn out a diffrunt sort o' rooster 'n you think he is!"

Could Hannah have seen the twinkles at play in her husband's eyes while he made this speech, perhaps she would not have waxed as indignant as her gentle nature would permit. But she did not observe them, and therefore all she could say was: "Well, I never!" in an undertone to herself; and presently the scratchings of Eben's rusty pen on the paper were all that broke the silence, save the solemn ticking of the old, very old clock in the corner.

When the letter was finished, Eben sealed the envelope and addressed it, and slipping it into his pocket, went off to the barn again to put Dobbin in the wagon.

Returning presently, he refilled his beloved pipe (I don't know what Eben would have done during those long drives had it not been for the companionship of that pipe), and called out "Good-by" to his wife, who, by then, was down cellar attending to her butter.

She bustled up the stairs in a hurry, to kiss him for the "good-by," as was her custom (for she was wont

to think to herself, "How do I know that we'll ever see each other agen? Things happen sometimes!"), and then it occurred to her that she had not read his letter.

The farmer looked as though the thought had just struck him as well, but he cheerfully gathered up the reins, and replied: "Never mind, dear heart; you know anyhow that there warn't much to be writ, only 'bout train time, an'—an'—wal', I told the man how good Ben'd been, an' how sorry we'd be to say good-by, an' sich. 'Twarn't wuth takin' your time to read, ye see. Now you be 's cheerful as ye can, mother, an' I'll be back soon. You 'n' Ben can have a reel gay time together this afternoon that's left ye to have it so."

"Well, I've got to pack the poor lamb's clothes," said Hannah, sadly; "an' 'tain't likely I'm a-goin' to be tickled to death over it, nuther! I do' know, Eben, but seems to me you act as if you warn't half so put about by Ben's havin' to go as I be!. Well, there! 'tain't to be expected of a man to have clingin' feelin's like a woman."

"Like as not you're right, mother; ye gen'rally are. Good-by to ye agen!" And off he went to mail the letter which was half breaking Hannah's heart, she was sure.

"Poor, dear Hanner, she's a darlin'!" chuckled Eben to Dobbin presently; and Dobbin bowed his head, either to signify assent or to shake off a troublesome fly.

In the hay-field near at hand Tom and Ben were at work, and the farmer, glancing at the little eager face and figure of the boy, muttered, with a shake of his head, slowly :

"'Twould be a dreadful pity"; and replied to Ben's loud, "Hello! Mayn't I go too, Uncle Eb?" with another head-shake and "Not this time, sonny."

. . . . . .

"To-morrow" had come—"Ben's last day!"—and in his very best suit the little boy stood at Hannah's knee, with his two hands—brown, plump little hands, too, and such a contrast from those the good woman had first gathered in the clasp of her own palms—clinging to hers, and with a big round tear in each blue eye.

On the porch close by lay the carpet bag which Hannah had found in the attic and had given the child for his very own. It was stuffed full to the brim with his old clothes—those he had brought with him—neatly patched and cleaned; also with his "second best," which had been the long-ago "little Eb's," and with sundry other necessaries which Hannah had spared from the belongings of her own dear boy. Some freshly made doughnuts were tucked in here and there in wrappings of white, soft paper, and now all that remained for both was the "good-by" and the grief of parting. A dozen times had Benny declared "he didn't want to go home," and a dozen times had Hannah bravely ex-

plained why it had seemed best, though her sad heart kept up its ceaseless protest against her words.

Her last appeal to Eben had been made the night before, and he had sleepily replied that "he guessed the sassiety knowed its own consarns, an' if the folks there s'posed goin' out West was the best trainin' fer street-Arabs, 'twarn't likely he 'n' her could sp'ile the job."

Hannah had accepted the situation by turning her back to Eben and shedding a few tears upon her pillow, and then sleep had come and "hurried up" the morning, and Ben had had his last morning of frolic in the old barn and about the place, and his last hearty good meal in the farm-house kitchen; and now here he was, waiting with rebellious heart and tear-stained cheeks—the sight of which was more than painful to "Auntie Hanner"—until Eben should drive around with good old Dobbin and the spring wagon.

"I ain't a-goin' to let those sierty folks be a-bossin' of me when they get me back agen," defiantly sobbed Benny, as he brushed his eyes with his jacket sleeves. "I ain't a-goin' out West; so now."

Hannah, secretly admiring his "high sperrit," as she considered it, patiently and gently reasoned with him, and reminded him that but for the "sierty" he would not have had any "Aunt Hanner an' Uncle Eb"; and while he was softening somewhat in his feelings, a cheery voice called, "Ready, sonny?

Come along, then; be spry's ye can." And there was Uncle Eben driving up to the door, looking more as if he were going to have a regular good time ahead, instead of taking a poor little, unwilling "fresh-air-funder" back to a miserable, lonely sort of life, which the little heart was shrinking from so pitifully.

Hannah was in a state of inward turmoil, for her husband had informed her only that morning that he had decided to take Ben back to the city himself, and see the child safely delivered into the hands of the society. She knew that his personal acquaintance with the great city was far less than Ben's, and so her distress at parting from Ben was terribly mixed up with anxiety for father and the fear that he would "git killed all to pieces with them dreadful, crowded keers an' streets an' things."

She held on to Ben with one hand and grasped Eben's arm with the other, and her poor face was a picture of bewilderment and worry.

"Oh, Lordy, Lordy!" she exclaimed, kissing Ben, then kissing father, and then going through the performance right over again. "Oh, Lordy! how I wish to the land ye could both stay right to home jest as ye are! Oh, father, *do* be keerful an' keep away from crowds an' sich, an'—oh, you poor leettle lamb-boy, whatever am I a-goin' to do without ye!" catching Ben close to her motherly breast and

looking into his sober eyes with a great yearning in her own. Then she turned to Eben, with more of impatience in her manner and tone than he had seen in his gentle wife for a long, long time, and exclaimed:

"I never see ye so ondifferent before, Ebenezer Grey, an' how you can set there an' see the dear child a-pinin' to stay with us, an' yet keep hurryin' of him to go, I don't see. There! I reely don't."

The farmer's merry face sobered a trifle as he drew Benny closer beside him on the seat, but he replied pleasantly:

"'Things what can't be cured has got to be endured,' ye know, mother; an' I'll be back soon to tell ye all the yarns 'bout York, an' how Ben's behavin' there with the sassiety"—giving a kindly twinkle of his eyes in Ben's direction. "An' now we've reely got to start. Good-by, mother. Ben, hold on to your bag, boy. Now, then, g'long, Dobbin, old critter."

"Oh, father," screamed Hannah after them, "do remember that you ain't been nigh the city fer years, an' I'll be terrible anxious till I set eyes on ye agen!"

Eben looked back and nodded, and Ben waved his new straw hat, and kept his eyes behind him until at last the old farm-house, with weeping Hannah at the gate, was quite hidden by a bend in the road.

Eben looked at his watch. "Wal', there, Ben, we

ain't no time to spare. Wonder if mother s'posed the train'd set down 'longside of the deepot an' wait much longer, if it *is* the 'commodation train? Mother's powerful fond o' you, eh, sonny?"

"Fonder o' me 'n you be," dolefully.

"Oh, come, sonny, that ain't nowise fair, 'cause, ye see, I can't go agen a big sassiety, can I? An' yet I love ye a heap!"

"Well, ye ain't looked sorry, like Aunt Hanner," from Ben.

"Oh, that's 'cause if I didn't keep chirked up, an' sort o' keep her sperrits up by lettin' her scold me—'cause, you see, she thinks I don't keer nothin' 'bout your goin'—she'd be downer in the mouth than ever. See?"

Ben tried to "see," but he was in no mood for jesting, and was very quiet and unlike himself all through the long drive to the little depot in the village.

Hannah awoke next morning feeling unrefreshed, and lonely enough to have had a good cry, only that she didn't want Tom to see her at breakfast-time with red eyes and the red nose which, unfortunately, always accompanied her tears. Fears for the safety of Eben, "so far away, dear man," amongst strange sights and scenes, and a longing for the touch of his hand on hers, and the sound of his voice, with the first streak of daylight; and a feeling also of re-

morse for having "scolded him for bein' onfeelin', as if he hadn't the truest, feelin'est heart in the world"; and with all that, holding in her own heart a yearning for the sight of Ben's golden, curly head amongst the pillows on the trundle bed; and the knowledge that she would never see him again, nor hear the loud, boyish call of "Aunt Hanner!" fifty times a day—all these had kept her from her usually restful slumbers, and now the morning had come, to find her quite out of sorts with herself and her duties.

Eben had promised to be back in the afternoon. Well, she would try and be cheerful when he came along, but the tune of "Oh, let's be joyful!" could not be made to ring out upon the air yet awhile, that was plain. And Tom, busy in the barnyard, missed it, as did, no doubt, the hens and chickens scratching around the door. "I declare, I do think there ain't a foolisher creetur around these parts 'n I be!" she said to herself, reprovingly, after a while. "'Stid o' bein' grateful for the good that there boy done me for even the mite o' time he stayed, an' glad that I was permitted to feel 's good as Marthy did, an' to make the little feller happy, here I be a-frettin' around, an' fer all the airth like a sp'iled baby! There! I'll stop short jest where I be; an' I do hope Tom won't let on how put about I've been the whole mornin'."

Thereupon the strains of "Oh, let's be joyful!" were launched forth upon the soft, sweet air of the beautiful day, and Tom, down in the meadow raking hay, chuckled as he heard it, and joined in, as well as he could, to help his work along.

When the noon work was all done and cleared away, and the whole house, from garret to cellar, was tidy as Hannah's industrious fingers could make it, there lacked but one thing yet to be put away, and that was the little trundle bed. She had meant to get Tom, during the morning, to carry it off up garret again, but there seemed no exact time for it, so that it stood yet, in the waning of the afternoon, a sorrowful reminder of old-time joys as well as of those more recent.

Hannah looked at it now, standing with her hands on her hips and a touch of sadness on her brow, in spite of her good resolves to the contrary.

"Oh, well, I had to miss seein' ye once before, little bed," she said, half aloud, "when 'twas nigh to bein' more'n I could reely live through, an' I reckon I can go through the missin' of ye agen; for, after all, Ben—he—he warn't nothin' but somebody else's boy, an' I s'pose I ain't no great call to fret 'bout havin' ye put out o' sight, now." Then she lifted her voice and called from the window to Tom, who was quenching his thirst that moment at the well.

"Tom, I wish you'd jest come an' cart this 'ere trundle up attic, will ye?"

Tom couldn't have heard her, for he suddenly turned and made a bee-line for the pasture bars.

"I'm terrible 'fraid Tom's gittin' deef," soliloquized Hannah. "But never mind, Eben an' he can 'tend to it to-night jest as well; an' come to think of it, seems 's if I'd as lief see it 'round a little mite longer."

Eben was expected by the late afternoon train. Hannah put on a fresh gown, "tidied up" her hair, tied a clean white apron about her waist, and took a seat on the low door-sill of the western porch, where she could watch the "white stone" in the valley, and also readily catch the whistle of the late train. Then she would bustle about and have supper all ready by the time Eben could go to the village stable, get old Dobbin (who had been cared for there over night), and make all haste up the mountain road to his own red roof and "his Hanner."

Before she knew it, however, the monotonous crooning of the winds through the trees and of the insects in the grass, combined with the fatigue of the day's duties, caused her head to slip comfortably against the arm of "father's chair" (which she had lovingly drawn close beside her for "comp'ny's sake"), and in less than a minute afterward to fall so sound asleep that only Tom, milking in

the barnyard, heard the expected whistle. Coming around to the side of the house presently, he saw her so, and laughed softly to himself.

"Reckon supper won't be ready 'gen Eben's comin'," he muttered. "'N' reckon Eb won't be th' only hungry one, nuther. Land's sake! I'm glad he's so nigh to home agen."

. . . . . .

The touch of something cold and wet against her cheek made Hannah start and open her eyes in bewilderment, and there was a shaggy dog, with his forepaws on her lap and his black nose almost into her face.

Naturally her first impulse was to scream, and with the scream she strove to rise from her lowly position.

But suddenly, from behind, a pair of arms clasped her neck, and a soft kiss fell upon her cheek.

On the side steps of the porch stood Eben and Tom, and both were laughing heartily.

"Sakes alive! oh, Lordy! what on airth's happened?" she cried, still half dazed by sleep and the sudden awakening, and yet conscious that something happy had occurred.

Seeing her husband standing there, she realized that the clasp upon her neck and the kiss did not come from him. From whom, then, did they come?

She turned quickly, with a glad cry, and met the

laughing blue eyes of the boy who had gone crying away only the previous morning.

"You, Benny?" It was all she could say; and then she sank back upon the door-sill and covered her happy face with her hands, heeding not nor caring that the dog and her beloved cat were on the high-road to the biggest kind of an argument.

Eben came forward and gathered his wife in his arms, and patted the soft gray hair tenderly, while Tom beckoned to Benny, and both withdrew to the barn.

"Oh, father, are ye all safe an' well?" was Hannah's first anxious inquiry, scanning him from head to feet with questioning eyes as well.

"Chipper as a clam at high tide," he assured her.

"I'm so powerful glad, Eben, an' I'm so sort o' dazed like, too, 'bout the boy. They're goin' to spare him a bit longer?"

"A good big bit, Hanner!"

"Oh, father dear, why didn't you *tell* me you was goin' to ask 'em to spare him? How long can he stay?"

"Till he's growed up, an' we're dead, I guess likely," said Eben, quizzingly. Then he explained to her that as she had seemed so broken-hearted at the idea of parting with Ben, he had given the matter serious thought, and that it had occurred to him to see if he could adopt the boy. And so——

Here Hannah interrupted with:

"But why didn't you tell me what you was plannin'?"

"'Cause if it tarned out that I couldn't noways do it, ye'd been a disapp'inted woman, an' I couldn't stand seein' ye so, could I?"

"Well, why didn't you let Benny know what you was up to, anyway?"

"'Cause if things hadn't worked right, he'd been a disapp'inted boy, an' I couldn't 'a' stood that, nuther."

"But you reely did act so onfeelin', father; jest's if you didn't care a mite one way or t'other!"

The farmer grinned. "Didn't darst to act no other way, wife. I was pesky afraid o' lettin' on 'bout myself, you see. But, Lor', how them eyes o' yourn did snap at me when my 'onfeelin'' ways riled ye!"

Eben's loud guffaw at the memory of it all, and of how he had given Hannah the "biggest surprise on airth," reached the ears of Tom and Benny, and the boy ran back from the barn to join his future guardians.

Hannah held out her arms to him, and he sprang into their embrace with a contented laugh that tickled Eben wonderfully, and he presently left Ben to finish the recital of the "trip to York and back" in his own eager way. There was much to tell, and the tale was told with as many embellishments as the child very naturally believed it to deserve.

He lingered delightedly over every part of the business from first to last, and especially over the description of the visit with Uncle Eb to the old cellar where he used to sleep, and where he found his "yaller pup" still being cared for by the "fellers," who had honorably remembered their promises to Ben. He told how Uncle Eb had given some money to the boys, and how they cheered him and called him "a jolly old hayseed!" (Hannah frowned just a little at that), and how, when the farmer told Ben he could "pick up his dorg and bring him along home," he (Ben) had turned a "cart-wheel" for very joy, and all the boys had cheered again.

"An' you didn't have a mite o' trouble with the sassiety 'bout goin' West?" questioned Hannah.

Ben shook his head, with a complacent smile. "Course not! I jes' told the managing man that nobody owned me 'cept my own self, an' I wasn't goin' out West with the rest of us 'less I was a mind to, an' I wasn't a mind to, an'—an' he jes' patted my shoulder an' laughed, an' told Uncle Eb I was free pickin's, he reckoned, an' Uncle Eb he laughed an' said I wasn't goin' beggin' to be picked, not if he knew it; an' then they both laughed, an' so—so then we went an' got my dorg, an' we stayed all night to a hotel in the Bow'ry, an' this mornin' we took a walk an' I showed him the sights, an' then we 'mused ourselves seein' things, an' Uncle Eb

he stared an' stared, an' laughed at everything, an' fin'ly it came time to come home, an' here we are! An' oh, Aunt Hanner"—giving her a squeeze that half choked her—"don't I wish all of us fellers could find Aunt Hanners an' Uncle Ebs like mine!"

"Bless your little soul!" whispered Hannah, and it was all she could trust herself to say aloud; but the speech of her heart went straight to the loving, ever-listening Ear above, and the tender pressure of her arms around the boy on her knee told Ben of the sincerity of her love for him.

"Wal', got through tellin' 'bout our spree?" asked Eben, coming to the doorway with Tom a little later, as Hannah was setting supper on the table.

"I don't b'lieve there's a mite more to be told, noway," replied the happy Hannah, beaming affectionately upon her husband.

"Wal', mother, the boy's yourn an' mine now, fast an' sure; an' I s'pose we'll be hearin' of the old tune right 'long agen, won't we? You ain't told us fer quite a spell that we'd oughter be joyful, ye know."

Hannah laughed, and glanced at Ben (who was introducing puss and the black-nosed "yaller pup" to each other with considerable difficulty).

"Guess you'll find 'Home, sweet Home,' sweeter'n

ever, won't ye, father?" she retorted; and Eben blew her a kiss from his horny finger-tips.

"Wal', I know *I'm* powerful joyful," put in Tom, "'cause I ain't done a day's work in all my born life that's been harder'n keepin' my mouth shet o' this 'ere secret o' Eben's, that he told me of, fust thing, when he planned it. Lor', I've come nigh lettin' of it out fifty times if I have oncet, an' I couldn't live through sech a strain agen!"

Then they all laughed, Benny louder than any one else; and presently, as they sat with bowed heads above their plates, Eben's voice repeated the "grace" with more than its usual fervor, and there was an unwonted shine in his eyes as they met the tender glance of Hannah's when the heads were lifted again.

"Ye see, I was main sure you'd need to use that there little bed to-night," Tom said later in Hannah's ear, "an' that's why I pertended I didn't hear ye a-callin' of me to take it up garrit."

"Well, there, now, I'm so pleased to know ye ain't gittin' deef," she said, her face beaming with delight, "fer I'd never see ye 'pear so hard o' hearin' before, an' you so clost by, too."

The starshine lay upon the red-roofed farm and silvered the tips of the trees and the bushes around. All without was peace and silence; all within doors was perfect peace and deep gladness. "God was in

His heaven, and it was well with the world" indeed. Eben and Hannah had looked a loving "good-night" upon their adopted son, and now, in the seclusion of their own room, she stood before her husband and laid her hands upon his breast, lifting her dark, shining eyes to his gaze.

"An' you planned all this fer me an' my feelin's, father!" she said, tremulously. "God bless ye, dear!"

"Wal', I ain't thinkin' an' plannin' 'bout much else than my Hanner an' her feelin's," he replied, smoothing her gray hair tenderly.

"To think he ain't goin' to leave us! Oh, Eben, God help us to train the leetle soul as we oughter!"

GRANDPA, MORDAUNT, AND I.

[ISADORE TO MADGE.]

THE EYRIE-ON-HUDSON, N. Y.,

December —, 18—.

MADGE DEAREST:

It rains and rains! I've neither fancy work nor reading-matter on hand, and I don't feel in the mood for my mandolin, nor even for my piano. What would I not give for a chat with you, dearie, just now, here in my own cosey sitting-room!—you and I and the fire, all snugly alone by ourselves, eh, Madge?

Grandpa often tells me that "my tongue hangs in the middle, and wags both ways." (That may be true when I'm a wee bit "saucy"—so he thinks—to him, bless him!) I am quite sure there'd be considerable wagging of that same unruly member of mine if only I had my friend Madge beside me to wag it at. It seems as though I have a great deal to tell you (when I look inward at my feelings), and yet, after all, there hasn't been any especial "happening" to enable me to get up any particularly interesting letter so far as writing goes. M. C. continues as devoted in his

attentions as ever; but, dear me! I don't see how he can get any further on if he never can get a chance to see me except when dear old grandpa is around. It's an honest fact, Madge, that grandpa actually manages to get between M. C. and myself on every occasion when we two chance to meet, whether he calls here or whether we meet at a neighbor's. Of course a girl can always tell—it's born in her, you see, to know when a man is in love with her; and M. C. isn't so devoid of intelligence but that he knows perfectly well I like him—yes, a very great deal! (I'm not ashamed to tell you of it, but I'm not so plain in the speech of action—not quite so plain, my dear; of course not, indeed—as I can safely be in this pen-speech with you, my confidante.)

Well, so all that we can do—M. C. and I—is to be as friendly as possible when he calls, or when and wherever we may meet—and—that's about all. If grandpa knew that Mordaunt Clifton really had an idea of offering himself to me (by the way, don't you think he has a remarkably tony kind of name?), he would positively forbid his coming to call again, and would lock me up, sooner than risk our meeting. I can't be absolutely certain, you know, Madge, that he —M. C., I mean—would offer himself, even had he a right down good chance to do it; but I do know that all signs seem to point that way, and, as I said before, a girl always can tell what's coming.

Grandpa's very silly—he's getting old so fast, dear

old fellow, he can't help his inconvenient ways—but he is really silly about his prejudice against Mr. Clifton.

He can't, even when I have laughingly asked him why it is that he does not seem to take much fancy to M. C.—he can't explain what the trouble is, nor give any reason, in so many words, for my satisfaction; he only keeps reminding me that when my dear parents (whom he cherished most fondly, especially my mother, who was his daughter) were dying he promised them solemnly that I should be loved as the apple of his eye, and guarded from all errors of judgment, and circumstances that might tend to bring trouble upon my present or future years; and, upon my word, Madgie, if I haven't suffered from that promise, no girl ever has been so bothered before.

You see, growing up here from childhood to maidenhood was all well enough, and I was happy and merry, even though my chief companions were grandpa and his sedate friends, and our blessed old, prim housekeeper. She's the kindest old creature, but so fussy and strait-laced in her ways. I heard grandpa—he never knew I heard it, though—tell one of his friends one day that she had been jilted by her lover long ago, when she was over thirty years old, and had never liked men since. Poor thing! I was sorry for her when I heard that.

Well, as I say, during childhood I was all right enough, but since I've stepped across the "thresh-

old" of which the poets write, and am a "maiden fair to see" (I hope). I feel a trifle like rebelling against the lines so closely drawn about my own sweet will and way. You're a girl yourself, Madge, and you ought to know how it would all feel if you were in my shoes.

I've seen plenty of men—I won't say that I've been quite a nun—for, as you know, grandpa and I have had various jolly trips about the country here and there, and he couldn't keep me hidden in his coat pocket all the time. But, truly, I must confess to you, as well as to myself, I've never seen any man, anywhere or at any time, who—as the boys say—"suited my fancy all the way round," as Mordaunt Clifton has ever since our introduction at Mrs. Howard's reception last spring. You know he was a college mate of her son's, and her son brought him up from the city for that night. Poor Tom Howard, how suddenly he died, didn't he?—just a few weeks later, only think! Mr. Clifton, you know, has been here in the village, off and on, ever since. He sketches a great deal (though, as you already know, he is very comfortably off so far as the goods of this world go), and stays at the hotel when he comes, and—and walks about a good part of the time, principally in—this direction, because, as he has told me, "he likes the scenery around here exceedingly, and there is a charm about the Eyrie which especially attracts him."

You're laughing at me, Madge; I mean, you will when you read this stuff. But, ah me! aren't you and I owny-doney chummies? and can't we write nonsense to each other if we like?

There, grandpa is calling me, and I must close this silly old scrawl, and send it on to you. I tuck half a dozen kisses and piles of love in with it, and the envelope will keep them safe for you till to-morrow morning, when, if Uncle Sam's servants are trusty, you will receive them to your kind keeping.

Good-by, dearie; I am always your true

ISADORE.

P.S.—Oh, I forgot to tell you that M. C. went by the gate yesterday while my maid Marie and I were chancing to walk down the path in that direction. He gave me such a bow and glance! Marie was so impertinent; she never dreamed of walking on and keeping her eyes in another direction. Good-by!

[ISADORE TO MADGE.]

THE EYRIE-ON-HUDSON, N. Y.,
December —, 18—.

OH, MY DARLING MADGE:

I think I can really send you quite an interesting letter this time, in return for the lovely long one I received from you last week. How nice of you to send me such a dear letter; and you're such a com-

fort, Madge, too! You're a kind of witch in your prophecies, as you will believe, *chérie*, when you read this letter. I'm going to have a good time writing it, and I'm not going to have Marie prowling about the room, pretending she is looking over my wardrobe to see if anything needs mending (such a trick of hers to find out what I'm up to), and all the while keeping one sharp black eye fastened upon me and the movements of my pen.

I've sent her way to New York to match some worsted for me (which I may never use in this world), and I am in for at least half a day of peace. Grandpa has gone with Miss Angel—she ought to have been named Miss Angle, she's so full of sharp corners—to the village to select some new dining-room curtains, and every servant the house shelters is at present in the servants' hall, cracking jokes around the fire.

So now, dear, prepare for fun. First, I must tell you that day before yesterday, in the afternoon—and such a lovely afternoon as it was!—M. C. appeared at the front gate mounted on a superb horse, and with him a man leading another magnificent creature bearing on his beautiful back a lady's saddle. I was at the window overlooking the lawn entrance, and of course had a good view of the whole thing. Grandpa was away at the far end of the room, writing at his desk.

Well, Madge, I knew on the instant that M. C.

had had the temerity to call for me to ride with him. I was wild to go, Madge; you can't think how I longed to mount that horse and try a race to the bridge with M. C. But I knew—even while the blood was bounding excitedly all over my body, so that I jumped from my chair and threw my French book across the room (I'd been doing an exercise)—that it was a hopeless case, and that I might as well hope to fly to the moon. So I sat down again, and meanwhile M. C. had dismounted and was walking up the path to the hall door.

I had an impulse to go out and meet him at the outer door, and possibly save him a chilling reception by grandpa. But as I arose to do so, grandpa said: "Isadore, my child, just step here and help me make out some fine writing, too fine for my old eyes." Well, I had to obey him, and so in a minute more Mr. Clifton was ushered into the room. Grandpa arose and bowed in his usual haughty, stiff, old-fashioned way, as he always has to M. C., and does, also, to anybody in whom he feels no especial interest.

"Good afternoon, sir," said M. C., extending his hand, and looking like a young Adonis. (I don't know, Madge, whether I've ever told you that he is a remarkably handsome young man, with the merriest, brownest eyes I ever saw, and a perfectly lovely sort of mouth, that looks so lovable in its every expression, and as if its internal appearance

were clean and healthy and—well, you know there are mouths and mouths, and his is about perfect, in my honest opinion. I should say it just the same if I didn't like him so well. He has a lot of short, wavy little curls, a sort of sunny brown, I might say, on his well-shaped head, and the manliest, straightest way of holding himself, just as if he felt himself a sort of king, you know.)

Well, where was I? Oh! he put out his hand and said: "Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon, sir," said grandpa, not even smiling, and not even asking M. C. to be seated.

Then our visitor turned to me—we had previously shaken hands—and said (I thought I caught a spark of fun in his eyes): "Will you ride this afternoon, Miss Irving? I hoped Mr. Berington"—bowing to grandpa with a smile—"would consent to your giving me the pleasure, and I have ventured to bring a fine lady's saddle-horse with me. I——"

"My grandchild will not be able to ride this afternoon, sir," interrupted grandpa, in what I considered a very rude manner, though his words and tone were polite enough. "She has a few duties on hand which will prevent that pleasure; and I am sure she knows, don't you, dear?"—looking at me over the upper rim of his spectacles—"that I am always anxious when she mounts even one of our own horses."

I tried to laugh and brighten up the situation a little.

"I have indeed some important things to attend to to-day, and am sorry, because there is nothing so delightful to me as a ride on a fine fast horse," said I, although I knew that I hadn't a blessed thing to do that I could not have postponed, if only grandpa had been willing to let me go.

M. C. looked disappointed, and yet I was sure he was inwardly "mad as a March hare." (Why are hares always supposed to go insane in the month of March? Do explain if you can.)

"Won't you sit down?" I asked.

"No, thanks," said he. "I will get the other horse back, I think, right away, and then start off solitary and alone. I am so sorry your duties prevent you from coming" (he looked as though he meant to say "grandpa" instead of "duties"), "and shall hope for the pleasure at some more convenient time. Good day, sir," to grandpa, but not offering to shake hands; and I just admired him for being spunky about it, too.

"Good afternoon, sir," replied grandpa stiffly; and then M. C. went to the door and grandpa returned to his desk. M. C. held out his hand to me as we reached the door (for I had deliberately walked with him so far) and whispered so that only I could hear him:

"You would have come; and I know well enough you haven't a thing to hinder you except—" He nodded his curly head toward grandpa's back, and

was gone just as grandpa, probably wondering why I didn't return to him, twisted his blessed old head around to see what I was about.

"Grandpa, I think you are very unkind to me, and very—yes, very impolite to Mr. Clifton," said I crossly.

He only gave a disagreeable shrug of his shoulders, and answered: "My dear, your grandfather is not anxious to see you wooed and won by a fortune-hunter; and you are too heedless, and I fear naturally too giddy, to be as discreet in regard to the selection of your—your gentlemen friends—as you ought to be."

"I presume I'm as discreet as most girls of my years are, and I don't believe Mr. Clifton has a grain of 'fortune-hunter' in his composition, Grandpa Berington!" I exclaimed. I was really provoked, Madge, dear, at grandpa's unreasonableness. Wouldn't you have been?

Well, he told me I was "getting saucy," and so I was, and I felt ashamed of myself for it when I looked at the dear, white-haired old head bending over the desk, and realized that I was showing temper to my darling grandfather, whose only fault was—oh, dear!—a little too much care and watchfulness over me. Well, I must hurry up and get to the more interesting part of my letter. . . . Yesterday morning a telegram came from the city for grandpa. He read it, frowned a little, and then

went to his desk and collected some papers together.

"I'll have to go down to the city this afternoon, girlie," he said, presently, "and I hope you won't be lonely, dear."

"Oh, take me, too, grandpa!" I asked eagerly. "I just long for a run down to the stores!"

"What, on a gray, cloudy day like this?" said he. "No, my dear child; you would be laid up with the 'grippe' in consequence of taking a severe cold. I can't let you be so imprudent. Stay quietly at home, and look over my wardrobe a little. Very likely you'll find it in need of attention."

I was vexed, and muttered that Miss Angel ought to attend more closely to that business than she usually did. Grandpa laughed. "Oh, well, I remembered that 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do,' and I was trying to think of some way to keep you busy, you see. However, I guess you're safe enough in these quiet quarters unless burglars break in and steal my treasure away!" (I wondered if he were thinking of M. C. when he said that.) Well, right after dinner I helped bundle grandpa up warmly, for it was exceedingly cold, and as I kissed him good-by he patted my cheek and made me promise to be very good (just as though I were still the hoydenish child I used to be, and when Miss Angel—far from being angel-ic in her temper—used to shut me in a dark closet

as punishment for "cutting up" when grandpa wasn't at home.)

I watched him drive down the avenue under the tall, leafless trees—every one of which seemed to be pointing long, lean fingers at me, as though they

MADE ME PROMISE TO BE VERY GOOD.

were trying to say, "You're not to be trusted, miss; but we'll keep watch over your doings!" —and I threw him a kiss as he turned into the road and looked back at me. Then I went to the piano and hunted up something to practise. I thought I could just as well practise singing love-

songs as to sing those tiresome old scales, and I felt just in the mood for love-songs, somehow. I don't know why, but I did, and I'm sure I never knew myself to sing them as well as I did then, for my voice was fairly good, and I sang with more feeling than I could have sung had my teacher been standing beside me, listening for every little no-account fault, as usual.

Finally I got tired of that, and I decided to darn some stockings. If there's one thing I perfectly despise doing on this earth, Madge, it is to darn a stocking! But I went deliberately to my bureau drawer, took out a pile of the old things which had been tucked away for some future siege of mending, and sat demurely down before the library fire "to be a good girl," and not let "Satan find work for idle hands" of mine, at all events. Miss Angel looked in once or twice, and smiled with intense satisfaction, dear soul! And Marie made several excuses to hover between the library door and the big hall door; and finally, when I asked her if she had any especial favor to ask of me, that she kept about me so, she replied that if I liked she would do the stockings, as she always did for her dear mademoiselle! I told her I had an industrious mood at that time, and that I would like to have her go to the village on an errand for me, instead of darning my stockings. Her black eyes snapped angrily—I have no doubt now, thinking it all over, but that the

girl suspected me to have planned a trick on grandpa, and was therefore spying on me—but I insisted that she should go, and made an errand purposely to get her out of the way if only for half an hour.

Well, I must have darned as many as three pairs of stockings (they only had a tiny hole or two in them) between the hours of two o'clock and four, and I was so tired I didn't feel that I could sit over such work any longer. I heard Bounce and Bess, my beautiful big dogs, frolicking together on the piazza outside, and couldn't resist the impulse to join them. Bounce, you know— (No, you don't, for you have never visited me here, and have never seen the beauties. What a shame, Madge! You must come soon.) Well, Bounce is a grand St. Bernard, and Bess is a greyhound, and they are the dearest things you ever saw. They love me to distraction, and have been my cronies and playmates since I was a little "shaver" of a girl. They are getting on in years, but they do still condescend to stoop to my childish levities, and when I went out to them they almost knocked me over with their boisterous welcome. I ran a race up and down the long piazza from one end to the other, the dogs after, before, and beside me, I fancied, all at one time. My hair loosened from the hairpins and fell around my shoulders, and the wind blew my front hair half out of curl and all about my forehead; my dress was twisted, and dusty with paw-marks from Bounce and Bess, and I really was in a demoralized condi-

tion when at last, out of breath with running, I tumbled into a chair, and gave Bounce, dear dog, a good hug as he stood up on his strong hind legs and tried to kiss me.

Fancy my confusion, Madge—just fancy it!—when a voice close by said merrily:

"Don't I wish I were Bounce!" And as true as you live, there stood M. C. on the terrace below, looking up at me, and more fun in his face and eyes than one can ordinarily crowd into a week of good times. Madge, isn't it a shame that a woman must needs blush like a red cabbage the very moment she is thrown off her guard, and so make herself a monument of confusion for the edification of the upsetter of her equilibrium?

I felt the hot color mount to my forehead, for, you see, I knew what a sight I was after that mad frolic with the dogs. But my tongue was ready enough, and so I said: "Well, if you're saucy enough to stand there laughing in that way, I'll soon 'bounce' you for an intruder."

"Ah, now, that's not one bit fair," he said, coming up the steps and calmly taking the vacant chair beside me. "You know I didn't mean to be an intruder, and I wouldn't for the world be disrespectful; but truly, I did have a very curious feeling in regard to Bounce."

"Indeed!" I remarked. "Well, I should have thought you a person capable of higher aspirations."

I kept my eyes fastened upon an uninteresting strip of meadow land in the distance, as though the cheerless patches of snow and short stubble were things of beauty and fascinating to behold.

M. C. laid his hand on the big head of old Bounce, who had always wagged his tail at sight of that especial friend, and who now sat down before us, brushing the floor to and fro with the bushy tail, and keeping a pair of inquiring, intelligent eyes fixed upon our faces in turn.

Bess lay down beside me on the other side of my chair, and expressed a few opinions—the nature of which I could not comprehend—by frequent short "woofs," and no wag of the tail. If those two dogs had any idea of what was coming, it was plain—now that I think of it—it was plain that they were not of the same mind about the matter.

Well, M. C. talked about the weather with me, and we spoke of grandpa's rheumatism, and of the mixture which had cured him quicker than anything else he had tried before. (Such very odd subjects, Madge!) And we discussed, oh! a hundred and one things for which neither of us cared a pin, as we both knew. And right in the midst of our conversation up jumped Bounce, and what did he do but try to kiss me, right there before Mordaunt Clifton's very eyes?

"Down, Bounce!" I said, pushing the dear fellow away; "down this minute, sir!" He dropped down upon his forelegs again, but before he walked away

he looked up in M. C.'s face for a second, and cocked his ears in a knowing sort of way. Then he went off and laid himself full length on the door-mat.

"Do you know what Bounce said to me then?" asked Mr. Clifton. "He told me I was wasting time to be talking nonsense on all sorts of subjects save that one subject which was the especial cause of my call to-day; and, Isadore, please take your gaze from that stupid patch of brown, dirty snow, and look at me for only a moment, if for no longer."

"Oh, dear!" I exclaimed. "Grandpa may be back in a few minutes, and I know he'll scold because I'm out here on the piazza taking cold."

"No, he won't be back till late; and you won't take cold on an enclosed piazza like this," he replied coolly.

"How do you know when grandpa will return?" asked I, somewhat astonished.

"Because I chanced to be at the depot when he boarded the train, and I heard him tell John to be on hand for his return in the late P.M. train. So then I knew the coast was clear for my call upon the girl I love best in the world. And now I'm here, and my secret is out; and—what kind of secret have you for me in return for mine?"

Madge, dear, there were actually a thousand electric batteries inside of me all the time during that speech of his, and yet, somehow, I seemed to have lost all power to get up and run away—as I thought first I

would. But all the while, too, I was conscious of a feeling of joy and comfort, and I knew, better than ever before, just what the state of my own heart had been for so long a time. Of course the blushes came fast and faster, but there was no hiding them from him, because he never turned those dear brown eyes of his away from my face.

"Tell me," he whispered presently, "on your honor, now, Isadore Irving, haven't you known that I was very much your lover at heart for a long time? Be true, now, and make a clean confession."

"I—I supposed you liked me pretty well, of course," stammered I, feeling like a goose, because he was watching me so.

"'Like' isn't the word, dear. Didn't you feel in your heart that I was head over ears in love with 'grandpa's' precious girlie, and that it must sooner or later come to a climax of some sort?"

"Maybe I did."

"And now that you know my side of the story, can't you tell me something about your side?" he said coaxingly.

"I suppose *I'm* no more blind to—to a—person's lovable qualities, than you—than you were to those you fancied you saw in me," I managed to reply at last. And then M. C. stood up before me and took both my hands in his. Bess, at that, stood up also, and "woofed" a little louder than before, and seemed very restless. Bounce, however, came

up, and laid his big, noble head upon my lap, and wagged his tail till I wondered why it didn't drop off.

"Good Bounce!" said M. C. softly, looking down at my dog with a big shine in his eyes, and holding my hands more tightly even than before. "Good old Bounce, you are glad, aren't you, glad for me, and for your sweet little mistress?" Then he turned to me and made me say I was glad, also (I said it finally, after he had teased till I was tired).

Well, then we talked a long while together, and—I'm not going to particularize, Madge, about this especial period of his call, and you needn't coax me in your next letter to do so.

Well, after a while he went away. He said he would come around that very evening and tell grandpa all about things, if I was willing, because he hated to be secret about his intentions and desires, and the truth would have to be told sooner or later. But on the other hand, grandpa looked upon him as almost a stranger, and seemed to have taken such an unreasonable dislike to him—though he couldn't possibly imagine why—that he feared to betray a secret which would more than likely deprive him entirely of my companionship, and perhaps make him (grandpa) very angry and unkind to me.

So, as I was terrified out of my wits at the bare thought of grandpa's knowing what had happened (you see it was a fact that somebody had "stolen

his treasure" during his absence, or, rather, had stolen the heart of his treasure), it was finally settled that we would keep our secret a few weeks, and meantime it might happen that grandpa would learn to know and to like M. C. better, and get used to seeing him around, and finally take a liking to him sufficiently to make the "breaking of the ice" an easy matter. We hoped so, at any rate, and so Mordaunt (I'm going to drop "M. C." after this, as I have promised to—to take so much personal interest in him for the future)—and so Mordaunt left me at the gate, after—we had said good-by, you know; and as I watched him down the road, I couldn't help thinking that he really was the dearest, most splendid fellow I had ever seen—or ever wanted to see. He turned at the bend of the road—just as grandpa had done earlier on that afternoon, that eventful afternoon!—and lifted his hat to me, and I was so nervous and silly and such a goose that I actually felt the tears spring to my eyes as I waved my handkerchief in return.

Then I went back to the piazza, and met that everlasting "maid Marie" coming from the drawing-room just as I stood at the hall door.

"Were you looking for me, Marie?" I questioned, feeling my cheeks redden, and hoping that, as I stood with my back to the light, she had not noticed anything.

"Oui, mademoiselle," she replied, with that air

THESE CONFIDENTIAL EPISTLES.

of affected humility which provokes me so. "Ze book zat mademoiselle send me for is at mademoiselle's sarveece in her room. Is it ze weesh of mademoiselle zat I s'all bring it to her?"

"No; I don't want it yet. You may look to the fire in grandpa's room, and see that things are comfortable for his return, and then go to Miss Angel and see if she requires you for anything."

Marie shrugged her shoulders and gave me a half-mad look, and I don't yet know whether she had been in that drawing-room window spying at Mordaunt and me, or whether she had just that moment entered the room in honest search of me. She's very sly, and, like the majority of French maids, likes to feel at home—if she can—with the affairs of her superiors.

Now, dearest, I've written such a long, long letter! I hope you won't be bored with the reading, but at least you'll have only yourself to blame, since you bound me to the promise of these confidential epistles, you know.

I went to bed early last night, for fear grandpa would notice something queer about me. I feel queer, that's a fact. Did you, Madge, when you made a change in your circumstances too? I feel so guilty, somehow, and yet I can't think there's any real cause to be ashamed of what I've done, unless it is the keeping it from grandpa's knowledge. But that is his fault, you see.

Well, adieu! Your friend, ISADORE.

[ISADORE TO MADGE.]

THE EYRIE-ON-HUDSON,
January —, 18—.

DEAR OLD MADGE:

How the days go by! The New Year is nearly a week old, and I—well, I am so happy I hardly know myself. And it all came about so oddly. Oh, I do grudge the labor and time of spelling out each word of this letter! I want to talk, talk, talk!

Well, let me see, where shall I begin? Oh, I'll tell you that the day after that memorable afternoon (when I stepped right out of thoughtless girlhood—so far as feelings went—and into the realms of womanhood, by virtue of Mordaunt Clifton's kind assistance) I awoke with a sore throat and a miserable sort of feeling all over me, and before long decided that as I had not been allowed to go to New York in search of the grippe, that accommodating disease had kindly made a trip to "The Eyrie" in search of me.

Grandpa was dreadfully worried, and questioned me closely as to how I had passed my time during his absence, etc., etc. Marie, who was heating alcohol for a gargle for my throat, turned to grandpa and obligingly suggested (I wish you had seen the expression in her eyes as she spoke) that "it was poseeble that poor mademoiselle had taken ze greepe

when she was playing wiz ze dogs on ze pe-azza so long—ah, oui, so vare long!"

Grandpa turned to me sternly, in spite of his affectionate anxiety, and reproved me for having gone upon the piazza on such a cold day, without my wraps.

"The piazza is enclosed, grandpa," I said, "and I was warm enough; really, I was!"

"Oh, oui, oui, sare; mademoiselle was no doubt vare warm in her heart, beaucoup warm"—with a queer smile as she glanced at me—"and it may be I haf make a meestake," with a shrug of her shoulders, as she turned to the alcohol again.

"Marie," said I, "you may leave that gargle here by my bed, and then go to the sewing-room. I shall not need you at all this morning. I'm going to sleep."

"Certainement, mademoiselle," she answered. But I knew that she was ready to tell tales of me, if she only had dared. Marie has good wages and an easy place with us, and she knows better than to lose either one or the other yet awhile.

Well, all that day and the next I was pretty well used up, and poor old grandpa was so anxious that he had the doctor up from the village, and questioned him closely with such fear in eyes and tone that the doctor laughed at him. Poor grandpa! how much he would have gained, and how much I would have lost, had we taken the trip to New York together on that afternoon!

Mr. Clifton called on the third day of my illness, but I was, of course, not able to see him; and, learning that I was ill, he sent me some beautiful flowers on the day following. Grandpa was sitting beside me when Marie brought them up, and if I hadn't felt so utterly wretched, both from my cold, and the consciousness that I was concealing the true state of affairs from dear old grandpa in a most deceitful manner (and that thought was harder to bear than the cold), I really think I should have laughed outright at the amazed expression on his face.

"Put them down in the library, Marie," said he. "The perfume is too strong for a sick-room." But when she had gone, he allowed his feelings full play, and told me that he considered it a very impertinent thing that a young man, almost an utter stranger to himself and to me, should send flowers to me as though he had been an old and established friend of the family. "Those things may seem very gallant, my dear, and quite right in the opinion of you young people, but in my young days, unless I had—er—well, serious intentions which—er—I knew were likely to meet with the approbation of—of all concerned, I never dreamed of sending flowers."

"Grandpa, how many times *did* you send flowers, anyway?" I asked. "I mean, how many times were you sure of the appro——"

"Tut, tut, my dear," he interrupted. "Your sickness is making you childish. Shut your eyes

and go to sleep at once, and I will go down to my desk."

"But, grandpa," I said, "don't you suppose custom has changed since you were a young man? I'm sure I think Mr. Clifton must only have intended to show his respect for us both when he left those beautiful flowers. He surely never dreamed of doing anything out of the way."

"I can't tell anything about his dreams, my child, nor need we trouble about them as long as they are not intruded upon our affairs"—(Oh, Madge, wasn't I, in a way, a great deal of an "affair" to Mordaunt?) "and that, I shall not for a moment permit. You must be careful how you encourage attentions from that young man which can only result to his confusion and your regret."

I almost groaned when grandpa had kissed me and left me to myself and thoughts. It did seem so very hopeless, Madge, you know. And how in the world would it ever end for poor Mordaunt and poor me? There were those beautiful flowers wasting their sweetness on the desert air of the library, and nobody to see them save dear, unappreciative old grandpa! "What a cruel shame!" I thought; and then, Madge, what terrible idea should pop into my head but that—that Mordaunt had hidden a little note amongst the leaves!

I remembered the sharp eyes of "maid Marie," and had a horrible shiver in consequence. I tell you,

dear, I got so worked up over that, that I presently began to burn with fever. Oh, dear ! there wasn't a single soul in the whole house in whom I dared confide, and there lay I, sick in bed, and my lovely flowers perhaps betraying my secret at that very instant.

Presently I heard grandpa call Marie and send her to his room to sew a couple of buttons on his coat, which had dropped off the night before and he had forgotten about till just then. I heard her come upstairs and go to the end of the corridor past my door (which is at the head of the stairs). I heard grandpa go out of the front door, presumably to the stables, about the same moment that Marie entered his room. "Now for it," thought I. "Sick or well, I must get down and look at those flowers and see if a note is there !" So, quicker than thought itself—if that be possible—I slipped out of bed, stopping neither for slippers nor for my wrapper, but fairly flying, with a sort of feverish strength, down the softly carpeted staircase to the library. There were the flowers—oh, how sweet they were ! But they held no message for me save in their own fragrance and their own peculiar language. Up the stairs again I sped, and was in bed just as grandpa opened the hall door and entered the library.

You wonder if I was trembling with the nervousness and the hurry combined ? Well, you may be sure that a good cry, with my head deep down under the bed-clothes, was the result of that escapade, and

my constant anxiety was whether there had been a note, and Marie had purloined it for reasons of her own, or whether there really had been only just the flowers themselves to speak to me of my lover's tender thought of me.

All my worrying and thinking, however, did more harm than good, and by and by I had such high fever that grandpa sent post haste for the doctor again, and I had a pretty hard night of it altogether.

Well, then your dear letter came, and (that was when I was getting well) I enjoyed reading it so much, and you told me such a lot of news about yourself and your good times! What a shame for Harold to have to go to India! Will he be gone fully a year? You ought to have married him and made a wedding trip of it. Never mind; maybe I'll get ahead of you in that kind of a journey, and can take you in on the way. Oh, what nonsense I'm writing! I don't dare hope for such a thing as a wedding trip, or any other kind of a trip save on journeys with grandpa. I don't believe he'll ever consent to my marrying Mordaunt Clifton, and I won't marry anybody else; so now! Well, to go back to where I left off—or, to be more elegant, I should say, "*Revenons à nos moutons*"—after I got well, grandpa must needs keel over with the rheumatism. (How he would hate to read that slang, "keel over"! But I like a bit of that sort of spice now and then, don't you?) And he did suffer badly, poor,

dear grandpa, for some days. I took the best care of him, assisted by the housekeeper, that I knew how to, and he told me every day how dear I was to him, and how dearly he had loved me, and how his old heart would break if anything went wrong with me, or should separate him from me.

Oh, Madge, dearie, you can't guess how I felt during those loving little speeches of his. If he had only known that I had given my heart and my promise to the man he cared so little to know, and wouldn't even try to like, how terribly grieved he would have been! Perhaps I ought to have confessed it then and there, and let the results be as fate might order. But, you see, I was afraid I would have to give up either grandpa or Mordaunt, and I wanted them both, because I loved them both; and so I kept putting off my confession like a coward, and continued to hug my misery.

Now you've had a sort of prelude to the full programme of the performance. What follows will interest you more than anything you've read, either from letters or from books. It may be fun for you to read, but I can assure you it was "considerable of a mixture" for me to experience.

On New Year's morning some elderly friends of grandpa's drove up, and coaxed him to put on his best bib and tucker and go down to New York for a day's "old man's frolic." At first he didn't care to go, but they reminded him of certain old friends amongst the

ladies in the city, and told of all sorts of good times they would have—the "three old boys" together on a New Year's Day outing.

Well, finally he decided he would go, if I thought I wouldn't be lonely.

"When will you be back?" asked I; and one of the gentlemen replied that they wouldn't think of returning before the 9.30 train that evening, for they were off for a frolic together for the first time in a year.

"Well, then, my darling," said grandpa, kindly, "would you not better send Marie for one of your village friends to come and spend the day with you? I am afraid you will find yourself lonely all through the long hours."

"Not one bit of it, grandpa!" laughed I; "and no girl would be silly enough to come up here for a stupid day with me. Don't worry, dear," I added; "I've my piano, my dogs, my books." And under my breath I muttered: "And more than likely—somebody else, before night!"

"All right, then, my child," observed grandpa, who, being a trifle deaf, had not heard a word of my mutterings. "Don't look for me before ten o'clock. Good-by, my love!"

He kissed me, held me in his arms a moment, and then, with the laughing excuse, "She's all I have, gentlemen; I'm apt to make a baby of my girl!" he climbed into the carriage, and presently I stood

alone upon the terrace in the glow of the cold January sunshine, and that was the beginning of my New Year.

Well, Madge, the morning sped away as mornings do, and the afternoon began for me after I had finished dinner at half-past two. The sunshine had somehow hidden itself in a mass of gray clouds, and the clouds were intent upon taking complete possession of the sky, for the darkness grew, and the air turned colder than before.

At half-past five Mr. Clifton was announced by Marie, and because she was present I pretended to be quite surprised to see him. "Why, I thought you would be having a lively time in the city to-day," I said, offering my hand in the most formal way. And his brown eyes twinkled as he swept Marie with a quick glance, and shook my offered hand as any stranger might have done.

"I've been with some friends in the village all day," he said, "and come now to bring you a message from some one you know very well" (meaning himself, you know).

By that time Marie had succeeded in picking up the handkerchief she had purposely dropped inside the door, and having no excuse for further lingering, went slowly out in the hall, her head held high, and a sort of "I wonder what monsieur would sink?" air about her which made me fairly long to get up and slap her as hard as I could. (I really think that

creature will one day ruin my naturally good disposition !) I let the door stand wide open, for various reasons, though Mordaunt would rather have closed it. But I knew that Miss Angel would have errands in that part of the house before long, and that Marie would have occasion to pass several times, and I wanted no mischief to result from his innocent call upon me.

Well, we talked for a while on all sorts of subjects, and Mordaunt managed to get in (*sotto voce*) quite a number of speeches of charming personal flavor, in the midst of our "flow of reason," till finally he said, with a laughing glance at me :

"If I were asked very urgently, I think I might stay to tea, seeing that you will be lonely without your grandfather, and might want some one to talk to."

"Why, I'll be glad to have you," I said, "only you must be sure and go home before grandpa can get here, unless you don't mind getting us both into trouble."

"There are no end of things I want to say to you, sweetheart," he said in low tones ; "but if the door is to stand open forever, and that everlasting damsel from the vine-clad shores of La Belle France is to be permitted to wander at will through the castle halls, why, then, where does a fellow's best chance come in ?"

"Wait a while," answered I ; "there'll be a chance

for a few little words, no doubt, before you go; but really, Mordaunt"—(Madge, when I called him by that name to his face for the first time, I blushed enough to have set my hair on fire, and stammered as though I had been born without the gift of speech. It was awfully hard, but how quickly one gets used to it, don't you think?)—"I am so afraid of trouble, and I don't want either Miss Angel or Marie to dream that there's anything between you and me, quite yet, you know."

"'The way of the—transgressor' (or lover, either name will do) 'is hard,'" quoted he with a solemn face. "Oh, my little sweetheart! I wish your grandfather would not consider me in so hard and unfavorable a light, without at least waiting for some cause to do so."

"I'm sorry," said I.

"Is that all you feel?" he asked.

"Well, I feel downright mad, sometimes," said I, "and most of the time very wretched and unhappy."

Mordaunt made a step toward me; then, with a little start, walked over to the table and examined some flowers which the gardener had brought from the hot-house, and at the same moment Marie entered to ask if I would have tea served in the library or the tea-room. (Mordaunt's ear had been quicker than mine, and Marie lost the picture she might have seen otherwise.)

"Mr. Clifton has kindly consented to take tea

with me, Marie," I said. "I shall be delighted to have company. And I think grandpa would be pleased, too," I said, turning to Mordaunt; "he was so fearful I should be lonely." Then to Marie again: "We will be served in the tea-room, tell Miss Angel, and order tea at 6.30, Marie. We'll have it a little earlier than usual, as Mr. Clifton says he must leave rather early."

"Oui, certainement, mademoiselle," was the suave reply, accompanied by the invariable French gesture; and the girl slipped out of sight in the shadows of the hall.

Once more Mordaunt advanced toward me, as I stood in the recess of the window looking out on the dreary evening, and contrasting the scene out-of-doors with the cosiness of the pretty, fire-lighted library. But as I turned to meet him, the room was suddenly illumined by the flash of the hall lights, and honest old John (the butler) never dreamed that he had "spoiled a scene" by the performance of his regular duty.

The shadows, which would have told no tales of the kiss Mordaunt had ready for me, vanished as quickly as his opportunity, and a comical scowl on his brow made me laugh.

"Oh, you may laugh, sweetheart," said he softly, "but it's pretty hard lines on a fellow to be 'so near and yet so far,' and all on account of that 'French spy.'"

"Never mind," said I. "We'll emerge from the depths of concealment by and by, and stand out clearly in the light of honest dealing with grandpa, and then——"

"*You'll* be locked up on bread and water, and *I'll* be kicked out of the house and the dogs set upon me for the thief that I have been, stealing your heart behind his back. Alas! for me."

Tea was served at last, and I enjoyed it decidedly better than if I had been sitting alone at the table, you may be sure. After supper I said kindly to Marie:

"You may go out this evening, Marie, if you like. I think you told me the other day that you had a sick friend in the village. John shall drive you down in the dog-cart."

A shrug of the shoulders and gesture of the hand was the first response to my words, and then the suave voice: "Zanks, Mees Isadore, but I s'all haf no weesh to go out ce soir."

"Very well, Marie; but you need not remain at home on my account. I thought, this being New Year's evening, you might like to go and have a pleasant time with your friend."

"Oh, non, non, mam'selle, I haf not ze weesh. I s'all haf plentee of good time at home. Zanks, mademoiselle."

"Yes," I thought to myself, "plenty of good time watching Mordaunt and me. But you shall be outwitted, maid of mine, you may be sure."

Mordaunt, with a funny gleam in his eyes, turned to her and said in solemn tones:

"Marie, the soft gray mass enclosed in your cranium possesses occult intention, and is, I might say, feracious in fabrication. There is a crassitude, I might add, also about your personality which is divergent from the adjective 'agreeable,' and I fear me much, O damsel of French extraction! that trouble with its attending synonyms will one day in the near future befall you."

Well, Madge, I wish you could have seen Marie's face as Mordaunt made this speech to her! I'm sure my own was a study, also, for I never was more amazed. (And I'll confess here that if I hadn't hunted those dreadfully learned words all up in the dictionary afterwards, I should not now be able to repeat them for your edification.)

She just stared at him with open mouth and astonished eyes until he had finished, and then all she said was "Sare?" in an intensely dramatic manner.

When we got out of the tea-room and closed the door, leaving Marie to digest his remarks, Mordaunt put his arms about me at last, and we both had a hearty but suppressed laugh.

"Oh, Mordaunt," whispered I, "it will take Marie a year to find out what is really the matter with her, and she may think she is the victim of a dreadful disease."

"Well, I hope she'll be so busy studying the problem that she will relinquish a while the study of her pretty young mistress," said he. "Now, have we got to sit within eye and earshot of all the servants during this short evening?" he continued.

"No, you dear fellow," said I; "we will have just one cosey time together, if we don't have another for years. We will go into 'Antiquity.'"

"Into what?" he exclaimed.

"Into 'Antiquity,'" I calmly replied.

How puzzled he looked! "Oh, Isadore! Into antiquity, and at our young years! Impossible! But, come, let's have the joke."

That is what you would also ask, Madgie, were we chatting together this minute, so I'll explain, though it will be a lengthy digression.

You know that my grandfather—bless him!—is and always has been a very eccentric individual, and that he possesses an enormous amount of family pride, and boasts of his ancestry sometimes a little too frequently for my comfort and patience. Well, "Antiquity" is a large, octagon-shaped room, built out on one side of the house, according to grandpa's own design and plan. He had it built long ago, Miss Angel says, before his daughter married, and fitted it up in queer, odd, antique style to suit his memories of *auld lang syne*, and his pride of ancestry, and all that kind of thing, you know. All the relics of former grandeur,

and of brave old warlike ancestors, which had been handed down from generations as heirlooms (coming at last into the possession of grandpa's family, and finally his own property), were collected together and placed in that room. Time-stained furniture, gilded cornices, tableware, odd pieces of china and bric-à-brac, ancient books, old armor and arms of every sort, weapons of war and medals of honor (bronze and silver and gold), statuary, old paintings and tapestries, and, oh, Madge, I can't begin to tell what is or is not crowded into that big, big room. Of course grandpa has added to the original collection according as he has had whim and mood, during the years past; but if that was his hobby, I'm sure it was an innocent one. He perfectly adores ancient things, and the room looks for all the world like a regular "old curiosity shop." The room has always been called "Antiquity." (Some one called it so, he told me, ever so long ago, for fun, and he liked the name so well that he has used it whenever the room is mentioned.)

Well, grandpa has never allowed a visitor in that especial room without his presence as a safeguard over his precious rigmaroles. (How provoked he gets when, to tease him, I speak of his relics as rigmaroles!)

Not one of the servants would go in—unless compelled to, to fulfil an order from him, while he is in there himself—because they are afraid of the ghastly

looking skulls, and figures clad in suits of mail, and of the guns and other warlike creations scattered about in "elegant confusion." The sort of mystery which hangs over the place, and its ghostly shadows, and its queer odors of sandal-woods and other wood fragrances, to say nothing of its musty-fusty sort of atmosphere, all serve to keep them at a good safe distance, and grandpa is content to have it so. As for me, I'm neither afraid of ghosts nor mysteries of any sort (I'm more afraid of dear old grandpa's scowls and scoldings, and grim, reproachful glances under big, bushy white brows, and over the rims of his owl-like spectacles, than of anything else), and so I was not unwilling to turn to "Antiquity" for good solid comfort with Mordaunt that evening, where I knew we would surely be safe from the black eyes of our "French spy."

I'm sure you would admire the old room yourself, could you see it, Madge. It has an immense fireplace over at one end, and sometimes grandpa has a big fire put there, and we spend the whole evening together, talking—he talks and I listen—over old legends and relating old histories, etc., till I'm ready to wish either he or I had never been born. I do get so awfully tired of the monotony of those weird old tales. But to return.

Now, I knew that I ought not to go into that room without permission, for grandpa had told me over and over again not to do so. But circumstances do have

such a way of altering cases, don't they, Madge? And really it was Marie and her very annoying sort of manner that drove me to that one act of downright disobedience. Mordaunt had never seen the room; indeed, I don't suppose he knew the house possessed such a place. How could he know, being so seldom a visitor, and not yet having been honored with grandpa's kind confidence? So when, after thinking the matter over privately for a few moments, I boldly opened the door (it was not thought necessary by grandpa to keep it locked, as, you know, the servants were so afraid of it), I couldn't help laughing at the amazed expression on Mordaunt's face.

"It's your turn, now, to open your eyes and mouth," said I.

"Whew! This is something more to be puzzled over than Marie had," he answered. "I should fancy myself an 'antique' indeed if shut up here over night."

"You wanted a cosey place in which to pass your evening, and here you have it," I said, laughing. "And not a thing here will care what we do and say, nor will one of those ghostly mailed figures take heed of us." I pointed to several full-length suits of mail, so placed as to appear almost life-like in proportions, and one could fancy a pair of sharp, stern eyes peering through the visor of the helmet supposed to be protecting a busy brain.

The light from the hall streaming in through the

half-open door gave a weird glow about the room, and oh, how cold it was! But there was a register in the wall near by, and I opened it, letting in a rush of warm air. I dared not allow more light in the room than a couple of candles would give, lest it should stream out from under the closed door and betray our hiding place. But the dim candle glow would not penetrate far enough to do any harm. "Now," said I, pulling up grandpa's "easy-chair" (aged half a hundred years) for Mordaunt, and a low divan for myself, close beside the register, "we can have a little talk together in peace, and then you must surely take your leave. Marie, no doubt, thinks we are in the drawing-room, and I closed the doors and left a bright light in the room on purpose to deceive her."

"Well, my sweetheart, it is an O. K. scheme, this of yours, and it just goes to prove that I've won the cleverest as well as the dearest of girls for my future little wife." And here I was suddenly gathered up in a pair of arms stronger, by far, than any I had felt about me before in all the years of my life, from one up to twenty. (I suppose some girls of my age would laugh to hear that, and feel sorry for the "good times" I had missed; but I'm rather proud of my record in that way, to tell the truth.)

Oh, well, I can't fill this letter with all the nonsense that was paid out by the yard between Mordaunt and me during our conversation in Antiquity. It

was interesting to us, but would not be to you, I'm sure. Mordaunt seemed to grow dearer to me with every minute somehow, and I presume he felt the same about me. At least he acted so!

He said he had never realized before how immensely important it made a man feel to know that he had the actual ownership of a dear little woman, and full control of her heart, etc.

I asked him if he wasn't a trifle premature in his sensations of that character, considering the fact that at present nobody save grandpa could be said to own me, and, for all I knew to the contrary, nobody else ever would be able so much as to take a mortgage on me.

He laughed, and answered that there was a comforting sort of old proverb still fresh in his memory, and that if I would pardon its inelegance he would quote it for the comfort of both of us as apropos of our present circumstances, namely: "There are more ways than one to kill a cat."

He's such a merry-hearted fellow, Madge; and truly, as I looked at him, and talked to him, I made up my mind that not another week should pass without my telling grandpa the whole truth, and standing up boldly and bravely for my girlhood's rights.

By dint of such conversation as suited us to indulge in, the time slipped by, and the hour came to an end with the chiming of the big clock in the hall.

"Nine o'clock!" I exclaimed. "Oh, Mordaunt, you really must be going now. How the time flies!"

"Mr. Berington will not even leave the city until half-past nine," he said, "and surely I can have fifteen minutes more, if no longer."

"Something may happen to upset and spoil all our good time, if you don't go this minute, Mordaunt," I urged. "Grandpa might come back earlier than he said, and really it isn't safe; you must go now."

Well, he got up reluctantly, and said he supposed a woman's instincts were safer than a man's, even if the man was her lover; but he would like to take a good look about the room before he looked his probable last upon the old curiosity shop.

So he went about from one thing to another, and we laughed about the tales which those ancient relics could tell if only the gift of speech were theirs.

We tried to sound the notes of the old lute; we fingered an ugly looking spinet (how stiff and ungainly were its proportions compared to those of my beautiful piano in the drawing-room!), but for fear Marie might hear, we played so softly on the keys that no sound responded save a creaking like the notes of woe and warning.

Finally, I exhibited a coat of mail which stood in a far corner of the room amongst the deeper shadows. It presented the appearance of a grim old warrior, ready to do and die in defence of a worthy cause, and Mordaunt was wonderfully taken with it.

"Grandpa says 'the soul of one of the bravest of men' once shone out through a pair of glorious eyes through the eye-holes of that helmet," I said.

"Let the soul of a brave man enter into it again, then," laughed Mordaunt, as he stepped behind the figure.

"What!" I almost shrieked. "You would enwrap your unwarlike form with that cherished and sacred relic of grandpa's ancestral days? Never!" I added, striking a theatrical pose, and flourishing an ancient sword in the air. He examined the suit of mail critically, and, finally, for the fun of the thing, he fitted himself within the pieces, and as I stepped around in front to take a laughing view of my warrior lover, his merry brown eyes peeped out at me through the eyes of the helmet, and a sepulchral voice addressed me:

"I say, sweetheart, that other 'and only original' soul—as the play-bills would express it—must have been less noble and sizable than mine, for this is a tight squeeze, I tell you."

"Better get out of it, then, while you've time to devote to the effort," I said gayly. And at that instant I heard the outer door open and shut loudly, and with the joyful barking of the dogs came the sound of grandpa's voice as he gave them his greeting.

Madge, I was in a state of mind not easy to describe. "Stay where you are, Mordaunt!" I whispered frantically, running behind the figure and trying to push my poor unfortunate lover back into the

only hiding place the occasion then seemed to offer. "Stay where you are. Grandpa is coming along the hall! Oh, Mordaunt, *do* get 'way in, and don't wiggle the least bit, because, you see, the pedestal is so shaky and small."

"Great Scott, Isa!" he exclaimed; "can't you find a fellow a more comfortable place for hiding than this?"

But I only kept up my petition that he would stay perfectly quiet just where he was, and I told him—as I honestly believed and hoped—that grandpa would probably go to the library for a quiet smoke, as usual before bed-time, and that he would think me to be in my own room. "And then, don't you see, Mordaunt," I continued, "it will be the easiest thing in the world for you to slip out of this dreadful place and out at the hall door, and not a soul will be any the wiser."

"But, confound it all—oh, pardon me, sweetheart, I couldn't help it—I thought he wasn't to be back until ten o'clock. Are you sure you heard him? I did not."

"Good gracious, yes; only too sure!" I said. And what with keeping one eye on the door and the other on Mordaunt to see if the least bit of him was showing, I nearly became wall-eyed, I assure you, Madge.

"Well, if I only had you squeezed in here with me," whispered Mordaunt in stifled tones, "I could

manage to endure it, but I'm confoundedly uncomfortable, and there's no really safe foundation for a thing that isn't a 'relic' to stand on, you see."

"Oh, never mind, never mind; 'twill only be for a little minute. He's just entered the library now; wait till he closes the door, and then you——"

Mordaunt interrupted me with a sneeze that made my hair stand on end with fright lest grandpa had heard it, and when I reproved the poor fellow for daring to make such a noise, he said he guessed if I were in there, and obliged to breathe into my lungs and nose such a lot of dust as was almost making an "antique" of him, I would sneeze whether sweetheart or life depended upon it.

Oh, Madge, I wanted to laugh, and I wanted to cry, and it was all so horridly unfortunate that I was as nervous as a witch.

I ran over to the table and put out one of the candles, so as to leave only sufficient light for Mordaunt's escape, and just as I did so I heard grandpa coming down the hall again. Out went the other light, and in a moment the door opened and grandpa stood upon the threshold. He peered into the room, which was then only lighted by the glow from the hall lamps, and his face wore a puzzled expression. I stood in shadow, trembling like a leaf. Never before had I disobeyed the dear old man so deliberately, and I felt not only shame for that, but a sincere regret as well for the deception; and, Madge, when you under-

stand that to those feelings were also added the fear of discovery, and worry about my poor, uncomfortable lover, can't you comprehend something of my mental condition ?

Oh, dear me ! Well, while grandpa stood there—the whole thing was really only a second in duration, though it seemed an age to me—the dogs came bounding along, and Bounce scented me, of course, even more quickly than did Bess, and equally of course he flew in and barked gleefully about me, which at once made my presence known to grandpa. . . .

(I'll have to excuse myself just here, Madge, for I am wanted down-stairs a little while. Wouldn't one think I am writing a book, to look at these closely written sheets ? But then I do enjoy writing a little now and then at odd times, and as you'll see, the date is really two days later than when I began this letter. Good-by till evening !)

[EVENING.] Here I am again, dear, and will lose no time in getting back to my scrape, and my worry in the room where grandpa caught me.

Well, after the dogs betrayed me so outrageously, the dear old man stepped into the room, and said he :

"What does this mean, my child ?"

"Oh, grandpa," said I, with an air of innocent surprise, "are you home so early ? I didn't expect you till later."

"I decided to take an earlier train, thinking you might be lonely, my dear; and not seeing you in the library, fancied you to be in your room. Then I imagined I heard a noise in the hall, looked out, and saw what appeared to be a gleam of light from under the door of this room. I was surprised, knowing that I had given strict orders that nobody should enter here. I find, however, that my grandchild has disobeyed me."

"Grandpa," said I, putting a bold face on the matter, "this is New Year's Day, you know, and I did feel as if a little change of scene might be pleasant; so I came in here and—and looked at things, and—well, I was just going out again, and have but this moment blown out the candle. Come, let us go to the library while you smoke." And I put my arm in his and started for the door.

You see, Madge, I meant to leave the door a tiny bit ajar so that the poor fellow in hiding might see his way out, and get into the hall and out at the front door while I was entertaining grandpa in the library. But, my dear, that scheme failed to work.

Said grandpa, as we were leaving the room: "My dear, I don't think you quite closed the door, did you?"

Said I: "Well, I thought I heard—heard a mew, and if the cat has happened to get in, I—I thought she'd follow us out presently, you see, grandpa."

At that moment a doleful and stifled "mew" actually came from the far corner of the room.

"There's the creature now," exclaimed grandpa, starting in the direction of the sound.

I pulled him back by the coat-tails. "Let me go, dear," I said. "You might trip in the dark there. I'll get her out and follow you to the library." And I sped across the floor in an agony of mind better imagined than described. While pretending to search for the animal (which at that blessed moment was, without doubt, peacefully napping before the kitchen fire), I whispered to that coat of mail:

"Mordaunt, you are abominable! If you play another trick like that I'll break our engagement; so there now! Scat! Where are you, puss? Scat!"

"Couldn't resist it, sis, to save my life," was his whispered reply, so low in tone that my continued "Scat, scat!" kept grandpa from hearing anything else.

But, alas! Madge, what did grandpa do but suddenly decide that he would have a fire built upon the wide old hearth, and celebrate the New Year's evening (what was left of it) by having a little chat with me in "Antiquity" again.

"I feel in the mood for it to-night," said he. "You enjoy my old stories so much, dearie, that I'll tell you some more, and John shall bring us some hot coffee while we talk over old times."

He rang the bell for fire, and I—wiped actual per-

spiration from my forehead. Pure fright, you see. He closed the register, saying:

"There's more cheer in the blaze of a wood fire, don't you think, my child, than all the warmth a register can afford? There's nothing like the cheer of a bright blaze to keep one in good spirits."

"Ye-es," answered I; "some-sometimes!"

He looked at me curiously and asked:

"Are you cold, dear? You are shivering."

"I think the—the library would be pleasanter to sit in," I replied. But he didn't agree with me.

All this while poor Mordaunt was nearly dead with the discomfort of his hiding place, and I thanked my stars that neither of the dogs had remained in the room, for they might have scented his presence, and then—oh, dear!

"Have you found puss?" asked grandpa. "She mustn't be allowed to roam about in here."

"She isn't here after all," I answered. "We mistook the sound. Maybe it was the wind in the chimney."

"Very true, dear. Ah, here comes our fire!"

Well, Madge, a big, comfortable blaze soon lighted the room brightly, and yet grandpa would have lights beside. And I—oh! I was utterly wretched and nervous. I gave one despairing glance in the direction of the steel prison in which my lover was confined, and then sat down, as grandpa motioned for me to do, on a little low stool at his feet. And yet—would you

believe it?—I actually had hard work to keep from laughing outright at Mordaunt's plight, in spite of my worry over him. Well, grandpa began to talk. Oh, dear! I had heard it all so often, Madge. But he went on so contentedly from one subject to another, and was so slow about the telling, that it seemed hours to me, and no doubt years to poor Mordaunt (though really less than half an hour). Grandpa took down from a nail near by, a helmet which he handled with reverential touch.

"This helmet," said he, "belonged to one of my ancestors, a brave man; and it was said of him that he never spared an enemy."

"Horrible!" I interrupted. "What a wretch!"

"My dear," reprovingly, "do not speak so disrespectfully of one of your ancestors, one of the brave departed souls of our house. But I was going to say that there was a time when an enemy would not have spared *him* had not a friend of his interposed and saved his life. That friend nobly sacrificed his own life, however, in the saving of my ancestor. That coat of mail over there" (pointing to the very one behind which my poor Mordaunt was half dead with prolonged agony) "belonged to the friend who yielded his life for my ancestor. A little weakness in the armor proved fatal at last, and a brave soul went out to the unknown shore."

"Grandpa," asked I, suppressing a yawn, and a desire to get up and scream at the same time, "why

is it that you never chance to meet some of the noble friends of that noble saviour of your noble ancestor? So far as I can learn, those dead and gone specimens of ancient humanity did nothing else save fight and kill each other, and I suppose the whole lot wiped themselves and each other out at last."

"Your flippancy is in bad taste, my child," was the answer. "But I wish I could meet with somebody who could claim that brave man for an ancestor, no matter how remote."

"Probably, if such a valuable being should ever turn up, he would be thought almost worthy of your granddaughter's hand and heart, supposing that he fell in love with her, eh, grandpa?" said I ironically.

A stifled sound of some sort seemed to come from the direction of the coat of mail. Grandpa pricked up his ears.

"Oh, that was only the wind again," said I. "It has almost a human sound, hasn't it? Go on, grandpa."

"I was only going to say that although you are young to marry" (and I twenty years old, Madge!), "yet if kind fate permitted you to have a suitor who could convince me that the blood of a——"

At this moment the coffee was brought in, and with the entrance of the butler came also Bounce and Bess. They settled down beside us at the fireplace, and putting their noses between their paws, soon quieted my uneasiness at their approach, for I saw

that they were preparing to utilize grandpa's droning tones as a sort of lullaby, and take a nap in consequence.

As we sipped our coffee—a rattling sound was heard. Grandpa, for a wonder, was oblivious, and only the dogs and I were listening for its repetition. I knew that Mordaunt was venturing to change his position a little, the poor, cramped-up fellow! And to encourage him with hope of speedy release, I said aloud:

"Well, grandpa, dearie, as soon as we have finished coffee, do let us get into the cheerful library. This old musty place gives me the blues!"

"Certainly, dear, if you like. But I was about to say that if ever you are so fortunate as to meet and win the love of a descendant of the noble man of whom I have been speaking, I would give immediate consent to your marriage with him."

"Well, *I* wouldn't!" I replied. "Not one, one bit of it, grandpa, so you needn't indulge in wild speculations of that sort. I don't want any old ancestor's friend's descendant, and you needn't hunt one up."

The dogs got up, sniffed a little, and putting noses to the floor began to prowl about the apartment; and, Madge, I froze stiff—right before that hot fire—with absolute terror.

But I nerved myself, and talked on, keeping my eyes first on grandpa, then on the coat of mail, and then on the dogs.

A STIFLED SOUND SEEMED TO COME.

"What on earth ails the dogs?" asked grandpa, peering over his spectacles at Bounce and Bess, who began to act suspiciously.

"Only restlessness, I guess," said I. "Oh, grandpa, you haven't told me the name of the brave man who saved the life of your brave ancestor." Grandpa looked at me as if he suspected me to be quizzing him about his loyal respect for the ancient relations, but my face was as sober as a judge's. (Indeed, Madge, how could I help but be grave of face when I carried so cowardly a heart?)

"His name? Oh, his name was La Salle. A fine old, honorable name, belonging to a fine French stock. Ah me!"—sighing a little, dear old man, so full to the brim with his memories, and with "ancient history" concerning his favorite topics—"ah me! those were grand old days. Would that I, too, had lived with them."

"Gracious, grandpa," I cried, "I'm glad you were reserved for the present age, otherwise I should have missed the pleasure of these recitals of yours. And what should I have done without you for a granddaddy now? Come, your cup is empty, so is mine; let's get out of here!"

He arose reluctantly, and turned to speak to the dogs, but at that instant Bess gave a growl and sprang directly at the suit of armor. Grandpa, fearing for the safety of the thing (which was only kept in an upright position by being suspended from

a hook in the ceiling above), started after her, and I started after him, as well as I could with hardly strength enough to crawl. But too late, Madge, too late! The violence of the dog's attack detached the armor from its fastening, and in the twinkling of an eye it fell with a rattle and bang to the floor, bringing poor Mordaunt with it.

Well, I stole one look at grandpa's surprised face, and one at Mordaunt's furious one, and then did just what any poor, overwrought girl would have done—sat down on the floor and cried and laughed, and laughed and cried, after the most approved form of hysterics.

"Sir," roared grandpa, "what is all this?"

"Sir," roared Mordaunt, "a *grand dénoûment*, I should judge."

"Oh, grandpa," I chimed in weakly, "it——"

"Silence!" thundered grandpa, in louder tones than I had ever before listened to from him.

Meanwhile, Mordaunt had disentangled himself from the various pieces of armor and got upon his feet again. I stopped crying when he began to speak, and even in the midst of my abject misery couldn't help noticing how handsome the dear fellow looked, with his face flushed and his curly head all disordered, his coat a mass of dust, and his eyes shining half with anger and half with dismay.

"A very extraordinary proceeding!" exclaimed grandpa. "And I insist upon knowing the meaning

of this intrusion on the part of this—this—person!" turning to me as he finished his sentence.

Mordaunt flushed more than before, and I was so afraid he would do or say something that would make grandpa furious and spoil everything, for my future, at least. But no; like the gentleman he was, is, and ever will be, he said very respectfully to grandpa:

"Mr. Berington, I am very much to blame. I have done wrong, and I ask most sincerely that you will pardon and let me explain."

Grandpa drew himself up in a dignified way, and said: "As you are not the burglar which at first I fancied you to be, you may explain, sir."

Mordaunt smiled. "I am not a burglar exactly, but yet I have stolen one of your choicest possessions, I'll be brave enough to confess, sir, and——"

"I would not part with one of my relics, you must understand, sir, for any price, or under any circumstances," interrupted grandpa, "and I must therefore request you to restore it at once."

"The article to which I allude, my dear Mr. Berington," replied Mordaunt, glancing at me with a smile in his eyes, "is not what I should call a 'relic,' though I'll admit it is of great value."

"You are probably not competent to judge, sir," said grandpa, with irritation, "in regard to what may or may not be considered a relic; all I ask of you is to restore my property—which, as you are not a burglar by profession, you have no doubt only

intended to borrow—and then to leave this house at once!"

"Oh, Mordaunt," I cried, forgetting everything but that something dreadful would follow if the thing were not quickly explained, "this is no time for jesting! Do set things straight, or let me!"

With that, grandpa caught me by the arm and gave me a stony glare which set me crying again. Then Mordaunt came up, seriously enough, and taking my hand in his, he told grandpa the whole truth, from beginning to end. And when he had finished, before poor old darling grandpa had a chance to speak, I got my arms around his neck, and begged him, if he cared for his little girl, to be kind and good to her and the man who loved her.

"But, my dear," said grandpa, releasing his throat from the strangling pressure of my arms, "I am——"

"Pardon me, sir," interrupted Mordaunt, "but you will have to consent to Isadore's wishes, because you are bound by a promise which I heard you make in this room full twenty minutes before my grand *exposé*."

"What's that, sir? I make a promise of that sort? Never, sir, never! On the contrary, she knows that I have never liked——"

"Me, I know," broke in Mordaunt. "But as a descendant of your—your brave old ancestor's very brave old friend, I am sure I shall strike you in a

different light; and, as such, I here claim your consent that Isadore should wed me!"

"Sir!" again exclaimed grandpa, but not as—well, as roaringly, I might say, as before.

Mordaunt went on: "First, my only crime has been that I love your grandchild. Well, you love her yourself. Why, then, blame me for doing so? And secondly, I have the honor of being named Mordaunt La Salle Clifton, and our flourishing family tree will convince you that in me you behold at last the sort of young man you were longing—so I understood you but a short while ago—to meet with, and to whom you would be willing to——"

Oh, well, Madge, it all came out right, and grandpa and Mordaunt sat in the library (long after I had been sent, like a naughty girl, to bed), and talked and talked till there was perfect harmony between them. I fell asleep from sheer fatigue of mind long before Mordaunt went home, and when I awoke in the morning it was to find a smiling, happy day before me, and a smiling, cheerful old grandpa ready for me and my kisses.

So now my long, long letter comes to its close; and as I began, so will I finish, with the assurance that I am so happy that I hardly know myself. Everything is serene, and skies are blue and sunny. If the weather is cold, hearts are warm, and— There! I hear Mordaunt's voice in the hall, so I'll send a

kiss and good-by. Do write soon, dearie, and pray forgive me for imposing this lengthy epistle upon you.

Your loving friend,

ISADORE.

P.S.—I nearly forgot to tell you that you must be here in June for the wedding. Adieu!

MISS BETSEY.

MISS BETSEY was a lady of uncertain age, with severe gray eyes and stern features. She wore her iron-gray hair in a small tight pug on top of her head, and covered it with a lace cap. At the sides of her face she had two little gray curls of a length to bob about and quiver with every movement of her body. Over her shoulders she liked to wear a three-cornered gray shawl, and dressed, beside, with a severe simplicity which suited the prim cast of her features. On a certain morning Miss Betsey sat in the basement dining-room of a small, old-fashioned brick house in New York City.

She was rocking slowly back and forth in the low sewing-chair, darning a pair of socks for her brother, Joshua Bunn.

He was younger than she by a number of years, and yet had reached an age when the title of "old bach," playfully applied to him by younger members amongst his friends, seemed rather appropriate than otherwise. He was every bit of forty-two years of age, and Miss Betsey would never see fifty again. They lived very contentedly together in their snug little home, and a faithful, auburn-haired woman named Bridget lived with them as maid-of-all-work.

Last, but not least, of the members of the family was Tabby, the cat, a spinster like her mistress, and as gray in appearance as Miss Betsey herself.

On the morning in question Tabby lay blinking and winking on the floor at her mistress's feet, and the sunshine of the beautiful day came merrily in between the stout "burglar proof" iron bars which ran up and down before the windows of the little dining-room.

Out in the quiet side street it was pleasant and bright, and some sparrows were hopping about in search of food and as full of sparrow chatter as they could be.

It was the season when spring and summer meet to kiss each other and part, and the air was filled with a sweetness which suggested country scenes and sights.

Miss Betsey, however, cared nothing for the beauty of the day just at present.

Her mind was upon less agreeable matters, and the very fact of her rocking to and fro gave evidence of it.

In a placid, contented condition of mind, Miss Betsey never rocked. She sat perfectly still, and usually in an upright, rockerless chair. But if she chanced to feel perturbed in spirit, and there were none to whom she could "express herself," she found that to rock her feelings out was the next best thing.

And now, as she kept the chair going, and darned at the same time—as well as the circumstances would permit—a good-sized fray in the heel of her brother's sock, she was thinking of an impertinent fruit peddler who had won a victory over her in spite of herself only a few moments ago.

She had been sitting close beside the window, peacefully busy with her darning, when she was startled by a loud yell from behind, almost in her ears.

"Yonges! Any yonges, ma'am?"

Miss Betsey jumped up in affright, and, turning, beheld a pair of saucy black eyes laughing at her from under a mass of tangled black hair.

It was only a little fruit peddler, and he held up some oranges for her inspection.

"Oh, my stars and garters!" she exclaimed. "How rude you are, you bad boy! Don't you know better than to screech into a lady's ears like that? Go right away this very minute!"

"Buy 'em, missis?" from the boy again.

"No; I don't want any! Go right out of my area!"

"Ah, missis, jes' take a squint at 'em, see?" rubbing one off with a dirty palm, and winking meanwhile at a man who drove the orange cart and who was waiting outside the gate.

Miss Betsey saw the wink, and it angered her still more.

"If you don't go away this instant I'll call a policeman," she threatened.

The boy, unmoved at the threat, however, deliberately seated himself on the upper step of those which led down to the basement door, and began overhauling the contents of his basket.

"Better try 'em, old lady," he said flippantly. "They's good an' sweet, an' good fer your complexshun, see, missis?"

Miss Betsey stood aghast. Such impudence was almost beyond her. She felt that she must do anything to get rid of him, and it must be done at once. But there seemed no other way than simply to buy his fruit, inconsistent as that might appear to be, and so, when he began again, and pressed his face against the iron bars with a mock humility that was disgusting as false, the poor lady asked in despair:

"How much are they?" taking one from between the bars and surveying it critically, with sundry sniffs as well.

"Ten for a quarter!" yelled the boy, with another wink in the direction of his waiting comrade, and a triumphant leer which Miss Betsey didn't see.

"I don't believe they're real fresh and nice," from Miss Betsey. "They don't smell anything extra."

"Lor', missis, like's not you've got a cold in yer head an' ain't got no smellin' powers," said the boy. "Them's the finest yonges yer can buy in the market,

ma'am ; don't yer know good yonges when yer see 'em, hey ? "

Miss Betsey glanced at him severely over her glasses. He must be at once gotten rid of.

" I'll take ten," she said hurriedly, and handed him his money, receiving in return one good orange and nine half bad ones, which he saucily and with amazing quickness rolled through the bars of the open window, and then with a loud, triumphant yell darted off in search of a new victim.

Miss Betsey surveyed the oranges, now rolling on the floor, and was quick to see that the boy had cheated her.

" Well, I never ! " she exclaimed to Tabby, who lazily tapped one of the yellow balls with her paw. " It was bad enough to have to give in to the wretch, after I'd said ' no ' till I was tired out, without having them so bad they ain't fit for brother Joshua to eat, and he's so fond of oranges, too."

She called Bridget and had the offending fruit removed, and then seated herself, as we have found her, in the rocking-chair, to think and darn together.

It will readily be seen that her thoughts were not such as to place her in harmony with the lovely day, for if there was one thing more than another which Miss Betsey disliked it was to feel that she had been " gotten the best of," or, as it is sometimes expressed, had " come out of the small end of the horn," in any kind of argument or attempt. And it was rankling

within her now that she had been completely subjugated by that miserable little rascal of a fruit boy, who even now was, no doubt, laughing at her with the man who drove the cart. Oh, it was very humiliating! And poor Miss Betsey brought her foot down upon the floor angrily.

Another loud yell, and this time from the cat, rang in her ears, as Tabby mournfully withdrew to a safer position further away from her mistress, and proceeded tenderly to wash off her injured paw. For a few moments thereafter perfect peace and quiet reigned; then suddenly a shadow fell across Miss Betsey's lap, and she looked up to meet the inquiring gaze of a blue-eyed girl who couldn't have been older than four years.

"Oh, my good land!" muttered the spinster, as the sock and darning ball fell from her fingers. "What do you want, little girl?" she asked sternly.

"Daisy tum in dere," was the reply, as the child pointed a wee finger through the bars.

Miss Betsey shook her head, and the wiry gray curls bobbed up and down.

"No, indeed, you can't come in here, child; you must go right away from here. Run on, now."

But the little figure outside dropped upon its knees, and the two baby hands grasped the iron bars and shook them weakly.

"Daisy tum in dere, p'ay wis pussy tat," coaxingly.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT, LITTLE GIRL?"

"Little girl, I tell you to run right away. Your mother ought to be ashamed to allow you to run wild about the streets. It is very naughty, don't you know it?"

The curly golden head shook itself, and the blue eyes looked curiously into the severe gray orbs of Miss Betsey.

"Well, you ought to know it. Go right out of here this instant. Oh, dear, if that horrid orange boy had not left the gate open I'd have been spared this."

"Daisy tum in?"

"No, child, you can't come in. Go away, do you hear?"

A puzzled and grieved expression chased away the smile with which the little one had been regarding Tabby through the barred windows, and the soft little lips quivered.

"Daisy tum in stay wis 'oo—an' p'ay wis pussy tat?" again came pleadingly and with a shade of weariness from the unwelcome little visitor, and Miss Betsey turned in despairing helplessness to the door which communicated with the kitchen.

"Bridget," she called, "just come here and take this little girl to her mother's house."

Bridget in surprise responded.

"A little gurrl, ma'am! Sure I didn't know ye had company."

"Very unwelcome company," retorted the spinster,

pointing to Daisy, whose little wistful face was pressed against the iron bars, between the small hands which clung to them tightly.

Bridget started back when she saw the child.

"Sure, Miss Betsey, ma'am, she do look for all the wurrld like that picter as hangs in the parlor, ma'am, av the woman in prison, don't ye moind?—an' she pressin' her face ag'in them bars so sad-like. Sure, ma'am, I don't like to luk at that picter, an' be the same token it's makin' me sad, it is, to luk at the swate child forninst us there."

"What I want you to do, Bridget," replied Miss Betsey sternly, "is to go out and take that child straight back to where she belongs. I won't have her here. I don't see how mothers can allow their children to be so—so—well, so instrusive, prying into other folks' rooms."

Bridget's Irish heart warmed to the little stranger, and approaching the window, she asked:

"Where's your mammy, darlint? Tell Bridget, an' sure we'll be findin' her to wance."

"Daisy do in 'team-tar wis papa an' lady, an' byme-by Daisy tan't fin' 'em."

Bridget turned anxiously to her mistress.

"Sure, Miss Betsey, the child's afther losin' herself, an' I'm not belavin' she's livin' in this city at all, at all, Miss Betsey, ma'am."

A little hand crept in between the bars, and soft, wee fingers stroked Tabby, who responded with a

delighted purr, and closed her green eyes for sheer pleasure.

"Arrah, thin, luk at!" exclaimed Bridget, catching the little hand and patting it gently with her own hard red palm. "See that, now; isn't she the darlint jist?"

Miss Betsey frowned. "She's a very naughty little girl to run about peeking into windows, and I won't have her humored, Bridget. You must send her right out of my area, and——"

"Sure, ma'am, it's the best av good luck to find the first daisy av the season, so I've heard tell, ma'am; an' if ye'll excuse me, I'd advise ye to jist kape the little creetur till Mr. Joshuy comes, an' see what he'll be afther advisin', Miss Betsey, ma'am."

"Bless me!" cried the spinster, aghast at the suggestion. Then to the child:

"Where did you get that silly name of 'Daisy'?"

The golden head answered with a mournful shake, and Bridget put her mistress's question more plainly.

"Who calls ye 'Daisy,' darlint?"

"Mamma talls I Daisy!" from the little one, in glad tones.

"What's mamma's name, and papa's?"

"Papa an' mamma," willingly answered the child. And that seemed to be all the question she could understand, for Daisy didn't know how to be more explicit, it was very plain to be seen.

Poor Miss Betsey was decidedly perplexed, and presently, with a resigned wave of her hand, gathered her work in her lap again and once more took possession of her rocking-chair.

Her nerves had been greatly disturbed, she felt, all that morning, and she was unable to combat her circumstances any longer.

Meanwhile Bridget, meeting with no opposition, took the small intruder in at the basement door, and presently had placed her beside the kitchen table before a bowl of sweet bread and milk, a welcome sight to the hungry little wanderer.

When the clock on the dining-room mantel struck the hour of twelve, the rattle of Mr. Joshua's latch-key was heard at the door of the upper hall, and presently a cheery whistle resounded through the small, narrow hallway.

Bridget heard it, and smiled. Daisy heard it, and pricked up her little "sea-shell" ears.

Miss Betsey heard it, and folded up her half-darned socks, laying them with stocking-ball, scissors, and thimble neatly in the prim work-basket beside her. Bridget came in and set the little table for two very briskly, and then brought in the luncheon.

"Yez'll not be havin' the choild in wid yez, ma'am?" she asked, as, everything being ready, she stood with her hand upon the door-knob ready to return to her own domains.

"In *here?*" replied Miss Betsey in astonishment. "Certainly not. Think of brother's feelings, at least, even if you do not seem to regard mine."

"All roight, miss," said the girl; "it's not hungry the darlint is, for mesel' giv her a sup av food awhiles back, an' lor', ma'am, av yez'd seen her ate it!"

The cheery whistle had ceased while Mr. Joshua had gone to his room to make himself tidy for the meal with his sister, but presently it was again heard, growing nearer as the gentleman descended the basement stairs, and ceasing again as he opened the door.

"Well, sister, here I am, and hungry as a bear!" was his merry greeting.

"And noisy as one, Joshua," was her somewhat snappish reply, at which he lifted both brown eyebrows, and came near whistling again.

"Hello, what's up, Betsey? Something's made you cross, I guess," sitting down opposite his sister as he spoke.

"Oh, nothing, only that you never will cease to be a boy, I suppose, instead of remembering your dignity and—your years. You whistle so much, brother, that you've no idea how childish and silly it does sound."

She gravely poured his tea while speaking, and a twinkle of amusement crept into the brown eyes watching her from across the table.

"Yes, Betsey, you're right, my dear. I do whistle a great deal, and somehow it does me good to hear

myself at it. Perhaps it isn't very dignified at—at —as you say, my age, but do you know, sister"—reaching to take the cup she offered him (for Bridget never waited at table)—"do you know, I don't really feel as old as I am, and, ahem! when I look in the glass, positively I am not so old-looking, you know. There are scarcely any gray hairs to be seen, and I'm quite a spruce-looking chap, you will confess, when I'm dressed up on a Sunday and escorting my — my dignified elder sister to church. Come, now!" He looked at Betsey in a quizzical way.

She straightened herself primly in her high-backed chair, and with a stately motion of her arm lifted a cup of tea to her lips.

After it was back again in its saucer, she remarked:

"Long before I was your age, brother Joshua, I put aside all silly girlish ways and adopted a style of dignity calculated to inspire a proper awe and respect amongst my acquaintances, and nobody can say that Betsey Bunn ever after relaxed into undignified and frivolous ways."

Her lips closed with a snap and settled themselves into a "stewed prune" shape, and that expression had never failed to aggravate her less stern and stiff-necked brother. Sunny of heart and merry of nature he always had been and always would be; and but for that—to tell truth—the family rela-

tions of Betsey and Joshua Bunn, spinster and bachelor, would have been somewhat strained and uncomfortable, notwithstanding the fact of their love for each other, which love lay deeply in the heart of each.

But, as I say, Joshua always rebelled at that peculiar snap and consequent expression on Betsey's lips, and had frequently been "riled" into a saucy speech by it.

So he finished the soft-boiled egg, which he had been attacking during Betsey's speech, and leaning back in his chair, pleasantly replied :

"Speaking of that 'awe-inspiring' business, sister, I've often wondered if you—ahem !—if you wouldn't have been—er—a little more attractive—er—a little less lonely, I might say, thus far on in life, if you had not adopted that particular style, you know."

A slight tinge of red crept into Miss Betsey's cheeks.

"I've never been lonely, brother, and—and if I have never married—if you are hinting at *that*—it is not because I didn't—I couldn't have had as many chances as any other girl if—if I'd chosen to have it so, I'd have you understand !"

She swallowed some more tea, wiped her lips with the extreme corner of her napkin, and proceeded :

"I'm sure I thank my stars that I avoided any enticements and inducements to embark upon the stormy sea of matrimony. Very few women have

had the strength of mind not to be beguiled into such sad, mistaken notions by your sex, Joshua, as I have had."

Her brother laughed.

"Oh, come, now, sister, you're putting things a trifle strong, aren't you? For my part I think—Well, never mind; I've followed your noble example most satisfactorily, haven't I? And when I reach your—er—your ripe years of judgment, maybe I'll thank my stars and garters too. But come, what's gone wrong this morning? you haven't told me."

Miss Betsey touched her hand-bell, and sank back in her chair with the air of a martyr.

Bridget appeared, and her mistress waved her hand with—

"Bring her in!" resignedly.

Joshua looked up from his toast inquiringly.

Reading the question in his face, Miss Betsey said:

"The 'wrong' of the morning you are asking about, at least one of the wrongs; the *first* upsetting was a very saucy fruit-boy; and I declare I never was so upset by anything as by him, and when I finally bought his stuff only one was eatable, and there's a quarter clean thrown away!"

Just then the other "wrong" came shyly into the room, holding tightly to Bridget's red finger, and putting one of her own wee white ones as far within the rosy little mouth as it could poke itself.

Mr. Joshua sat bolt upright, and dropped his knife and fork in pure amazement.

"A child in this house?" he exclaimed.

Miss Betsey grinned triumphantly and turned to Bridget.

"There, what did I tell you?" she cried. "Didn't I tell you that brother would not want her in here any more than I do? Now you are satisfied, Bridget, aren't you?"

But even before she finished and turned to her brother again, he had opened his arms, and the little one, without a moment's hesitation, sprang gleefully into them.

He held her closely, and answering Miss Betsey's astonished questioning, exclaimed:

"A little child in our house, Betsey! Ah, you didn't know me if you thought I would not welcome a visitor like this. Some little neighbor, I suppose. And what is her name? and why has she been kept in the kitchen?"

Miss Betsey was too overcome with indignation to answer, so Bridget stepped forward and explained the entire circumstances, Mr. Joshua meanwhile clasping the little one's hands in his own and beaming affectionately out of his tender brown eyes into the wondering blue ones of the young stranger.

When Bridget had finished, and stood with admiring gaze bent upon the unusual sight of a child on her bachelor master's knee, he told her kindly that

she might return to her work and leave little Miss Daisy with his sister and himself; and the girl, bravely resisting the temptation to cast a smile of triumph at her mistress, withdrew quietly and took Tabby into her confidence.

"Sure, thin, Tabby, me cat, if the mistress doesn't have to swally her feelin's still more, it's mistook I am intoirely. It's jist as I knowed it ud be. Mr. Joshuy, he's clane gone alriddy over the darlint, an' if he do l'ave her go the noight, onless he's afther findin' her folks, I'm not Biddy O'Flaharty at all, at all."

Meanwhile Miss Betsey had remarked to her brother that in her opinion the child ought to go at once to a station-house, and "let the police take charge of her," she added, more and more annoyed as her brother pressed his bearded cheek to the peachy skin of the child on his knee.

He looked up quickly. "Oh, no, sister; she will stay here safely, while I go to the depot near by and make inquiries concerning her. Possibly her father and her aunt—for without doubt the little one is motherless—are fretting about her at this moment. I have finished my lunch, and if you'll excuse me, I'll go at once."

He put Daisy gently upon the floor, and the child ran with all speed into the kitchen in search of her friend Bridget.

"Why, Betsey," said the gentleman, "she acts

as if she were afraid of you. You haven't scolded her, surely, a mite of a child like that, and lost in the bargain!"

"Humph! She knows well enough that she'll get no nonsense from me. I firmly refuse to think her lost, but only a rude little girl whose mother lets her run wild about the streets; and she was persistent enough to get in here because she wanted a good time with Tabby."

"Really, Betsey, you are ridiculous," was all the reply that Mr. Joshua would vouchsafe, he was so honestly annoyed with his sister. And he went up the basement stairs at once, for fear he might be tempted to say a little more of his mind, while Miss Betsey, equally provoked (because she knew she was entirely in the wrong), gave the partly darned socks a shove down to the depths of the work-basket, and turned her attention to some other sewing.

"They shall stay there unfinished," she said grimly. "Joshua is getting very annoying lately. To think that, after my years of avoidance of such cares and responsibilities, I should after all have a troublesome child under my roof! It is too much. And Joshua—he seemed to—to actually love the girl. And it was so undignified of him to make such a fuss over her. Bah!"

Her brother, at the time, was hurrying down the street to the depot, and doing some rapid thinking as he went along. How long it was since he had

put his arms about anybody with a caress, and how long since any lips had touched his! The last time had been fifteen years ago, when he had put his strong young arms about his invalid mother and tenderly carried her up to the room she was never to leave again in the flesh. That dear, idolized mother, who had been left a widow when he and Betsey were mere girl and boy, and who had been both mother and father to them in her devotion!

He remembered that Betsey had never been very demonstrative in her nature, and that from himself came all the loving words and caresses which had made "mother" so happy. And he remembered that as long as she lived his lips had given and received the kisses of tenderest love and devotion; and the soft, gentle clasp of that mother's hand he could feel even now, when he gave himself up—as he often liked to—to the quiet visits of Memory and her train.

His mother's death was a sad blow to him, poor Joshua, and a sorrow which, even in fifteen years, he yet mourned in secret. Whatever other sorrows had come to him, nobody had ever heard complaint of them from the genial man of business, who had made for himself and sister a comfortable home, and an income which was shared gladly with the poor and the needy crossing his daily path.

All of this he was thinking, hurrying along to the crowded and bustling railroad depot, and presently

he was making inquiries in regard to his little visitor at home.

In vain, however; for all he could learn was that after the ten o'clock train went West that morning, a child (answering Daisy's description) was seen crying on the platform for "papa and the lady"; that the stationmaster had sent for a policeman to take charge of her, and that when the officer arrived the child had disappeared, and in the confusion of other matters they had paid no further attention to the lost girl, and it was likely that she had wandered off to some side street quite by herself, because the noise and confusion of the depot probably frightened her.

The man added that in his opinion the little one wasn't worth advertising, as more than likely she belonged to that class of poor little things who were "lost on purpose," and so forth.

Mr. Joshua Bunn returned to his home with mingled feelings which somehow couldn't be put into speech.

There was no doubt but that Daisy had indeed been "lost on purpose," otherwise her guardians would have telegraphed in frantic haste about the strayed child, and that—so said the clerk in the telegraph office—they had not done. Well, if nobody else wanted the pretty baby, Mr. Joshua did, and he would keep her until he could be quite sure that she had been purposely abandoned, and then he would make arrangements for her comfort elsewhere. He

knew that, owing to his sister's aversion to children, the child could not find permanent shelter under their roof, and, at any rate, the little thing would not be happy there with only an—well, he wouldn't use the term "*old maid*"—only a maiden lady and a bearded old bachelor for company, except Bridget and the ancient Tabby.

For himself, the sight of that sweet child-face, if he could see its sunshine every day, would make his home an earthly paradise, he was sure. But, alas! poor Betsey.

He drew his brows anxiously together in anticipation of her disgust when he should have to tell her that Daisy was in very truth a homeless little wanderer, and that for the night would have to be their guest, whether welcome or unwelcome, poor little waif!

When Mr. Joshua again reached home he smiled happily and with a strange, new warmth in his heart at the sight of the dear little face watching for him through the bars of the basement window.

Miss Betsey had retired to her own room, and Bridget and her charge had the dining-room quite to themselves. "Call him 'Papa Joshuy,' darlint," whispered Bridget, her eyes twinkling with fun as she watched her master's face. He was pausing a moment at the area gate to take in more truly the pretty picture at the window, and, obedient to Bridget's whisper, the child cried gleefully: "Papa Yossy! papa Yossy!" clapping her hands meanwhile.

The "old bach" started, and colored to the roots of his hair, but waved his hand to the little girl and ran up the steps laughing.

"Oh! if sister Betsey had heard that," he thought. "I think she would have swept the child bodily out of the window, bars and all."

He put his latch-key in the door and pursed his lips, according to habit, for the usual whistle, but checked himself, under pressure of the unusual circumstances, and because he felt it wise to keep on "Betsey's right side."

Miss Betsey heard him enter, and came stiffly downstairs. "Well, what news, Joshua?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing satisfactory, my dear, I am sorry to say. Little Daisy is evidently an abandoned child, and there is nothing left for us to do but take care of her until some arrangements can be made to place her in a good institution."

"Do you mean that that child—the child of such very shocking people as those who would abandon her—must be under this roof all night?" from Miss Betsey, whose voice rose two notes above its natural pitch.

"I mean just that, Betsey; and as for the people who deserted her, I am not sure they were related, for the child gives evidence of a refined birth and gentle breeding, and I am not yet ready to turn her over to the cold charity of a police station-house."

"Joshua Bunn, you will kill me!" screamed Miss

Betsey, leaning helplessly against the wall and staring at her brother.

"No, dear, you aren't so easily killed, you know. And as for our little visitor, do try and remember that she has done nothing deserving of your dislike, and you can at least refrain from scaring the wits out of her."

"But, brother, I——"

"But, sister, *I* am going to take charge of this little job, if you please," interrupted Mr. Joshua, going to the irate lady, and putting a kiss (very lightly, it must be confessed) upon her frigid brow. "You are going to be a kind, Christian woman, and remember that we can't turn out of the safe shelter of our home the wee, wandering little lamb, who was, perhaps, led right here by a Power above us all, and for some wise purpose of His own."

"Don't be a fool, Joshua," was the hasty reply.

"I'll try not, my dear, and do you also refrain from being—foolish."

He went down to the basement, followed by Betsey, and the child flew with extended arms to meet him.

"I love my new papa," she said, and then clung about his neck in fright because Miss Betsey advanced with uplifted hand and fierce, surprised eyes.

Mr. Joshua put out his hand and warded off the ungentle slap which was meant for the wee hand upon his shoulder.

"Did I ever hear the like!" gasped the spinster, sinking upon the lounge and breathing heavily. "Did I ever in my life hear of such shamefaced goings-on!"

"Ozzer papa s'ap Daisy too. Don't love ozzer papa; love dis new papa," plaintively exclaimed the baby of four little years of life in this strange wide world.

Miss Betsey again started up.

"Joshua Bunn, are you going to allow that child to give you an absurd, shameless name like that?"

"Don't be ridiculous, sister. How should this mere baby know what she says? Don't worry, Betsey, dear, it will only be for a few days, and when you are ready to be kind to her, she will make you love a child at last."

Turning to Bridget, who had come into the room meanwhile, he asked:

"If I keep Daisy here a few days, my good girl, will you object to caring for her and keeping her from troubling your mistress, if you please?"

"'Dade an' I wull, sir. It's not Biddy O'Flaharty as ud spake a mane wurrd to a choild; an' whin Miss Betsey"—casting a smile at the lady—"do be afther falin' better av her nerves, sir, Mr. Joshuy (she was jist kilt intoirely wid the broth av a boy yisterday, you see, sir), why, it's hersel' that'll be tinder with Miss Daasy as well as Biddy, sir."

"No doubt of it, Bridget," was the answer from Mr. Joshua, as he set the little girl again upon her

feet. "Now I'll go back to business. And, sister, don't you think the child ought to sleep a little? She must be very tired after her journey and all she has gone through with since. By-by, darling, I'll be back soon."

He glanced at Miss Betsey, who sat, the picture of despair, upon the extreme edge of the lounge, her thin, bloodless lips pursed together tightly.

When the bachelor returned, late in the afternoon, his sister was out, and Bridget and her charge were in the kitchen.

There were traces of tears on the little one's cheeks, and her blue eyes looked heavy. She came and sat listlessly upon his knee and leaned her head upon his breast.

"Daisy tan't fin' mamma. Mamma want Daisy to tum home now. Daisy do home to mamma."

Sad, tearful little voice! It pierced through Mr. Joshua's tender heart at once, and he kissed the top of the curly head which leaned heavily against him.

"There, sir, she's been cryin' an' frettin' fer her ma, so she has, all the blissid afternoon, an' there warn't no consolin' av her, sir. Miss Betsey, she scolded—but, Lor', not so much, sir, as you'd 'a' thunk she would, seein' as how she took on before—an' fin'ly she went out, an' I seen her walkin' towards the avenyer, sir, as fast as I ever see her walk in my loife."

Mr. Joshua laughed.

"She's walking off her nervousness, I presume," he said, "and when she comes back I've no doubt but

DAISY AND MR. JOSHUA.

we'll all get on famously together." He seated himself in the low sewing-chair, and, rocking to and fro, sang to the tired little child, who snuggled herself

contentedly in his arms and presently closed her eyes in deep slumber.

Bridget stood in the doorway, her bared arms akimbo and her honest face full of pleasure, as she thought to herself:

"Sure, he's a born Christyun, bless him! An' it's a sin an' a shame that some foine gurrl ain't got him for better nor wuss, so it are!"

Before long, Betsey returned, and seeing her brother's unusual occupation through the window, she went silently to her own room to settle her indignant nerves as best as she might before the ringing of the dinner-bell.

When she did finally go down, the "bone of contention" had been carried up and laid, sound asleep, upon Bridget's bed, and Miss Betsey's brow cleared itself from frowns in consequence.

For days Mr. Joshua searched the papers carefully for some clew, if such there might be, in regard to the lost child. There had been a railroad accident on the afternoon of the day that Daisy had come to his house, and it was possible—so Mr. Joshua said to his sister—that the two persons having had Daisy in charge had been amongst the killed. In that case, the child was indeed to be pitied.

"Unless," interrupted Miss Betsey, scornfully, "they were deliberately running away from the girl, abandoning her in a strange city. In that case, they

deserved to be killed, and it served 'em right, too!"

"Why, sister!"

"Yes, I say it again—served 'em right! And just see what trouble they've brought upon us, too!"

"Well, that will soon be over, my dear, for I shall take the little creature to-morrow to Groveville and place her in the Children's Home there. It is certainly very curious that if the child's mother is living we do not find inquiries in the papers. On the other hand, if she is not living, how is it that Daisy frets about 'mamma' so? Then, again, how did it happen that, as she says, she was in the steam-car with 'papa and the lady,' if that lady wasn't her mother, you see? And if she had been the mother, the child would not have called her 'the lady'! I am afraid, Betsey, that there has been a great wrong somewhere in this business."

"Great wrong?" snapped his sister. "Well, I should give it a truer name, and call it downright deviltry; that's what I should call it. The whole thing is horrid and shameful, and to think that it has invaded our peaceful home!"

Mr. Joshua looked wistfully at his sister.

(The capped head was shaking wrathfully, and the gray curls were bobbing about. It wasn't exactly a favorable moment to ask the question his heart was prompting, but he must venture it, nevertheless.)

"Sister Betsey, I don't suppose you'd be willing to keep the little one a while longer, would you? I shall really miss her so, and she hasn't been the least bit of trouble to you, as Bridget has——"

"Joshua Bunn! Well, there, I am completely astonished!".

Her brother hastily took up his hat.

"Never mind, dear; of course it wouldn't do. I can see that plainly. Good-by; I'm off to business now. Why, it wouldn't do at all for you, or (*sotto voce*) for Daisy, either."

A little later, Bridget, who knew that her charge was to be taken away on the morrow, brought the child's little stockings to Miss Betsey.

"See, ma'am, I've washed 'em clane, an' ironed 'em nice, an' she do be settin' wid the two fate av her wrapped in me apun, ma'am, while I make so bould as to ax yez av ye'd plaze put a bit av a darrn in the knaas, Miss Betsey, ma'am."

Miss Betsey resignedly took the little stockings and passed her fingers inside. On each knee was a small frayed hole, and Miss Betsey began the mending in grim silence, while Bridget returned from the kitchen and planted the small owner of the stockings right before Miss Betsey's eyes, on the lounge.

"Stay there, darlint; auntie'll have 'em all mindid for ye soon."

Before the spinster could open her lips to reprove Bridget for the unwarrantable liberty she had taken

in the use of that title, the little girl herself spoke up sweetly:

"Auntie men' 'em all nice for Daisy," she repeated after Bridget, innocent of any offence, and the girl went bursting with laughter back to her own safe quarters.

Miss Betsey looked over her spectacles at the child, but, for the beauty of the wee visitor, she somehow couldn't make her glance a severe one just then.

Such a pair of violet eyes, such sunny, golden curls, such perfect little limbs! And was there ever a more dainty little foot than the wee bare one which had escaped the confines of Bridget's apron? Curling, pink toes, and snowy, arching instep—a little foot to be taken in one's hand and caressed, and kissed, as well.

Miss Betsey, prim maiden lady though she was, yet liked to look at pretty things as well as anybody, and now that she was actually alone with her little visitor (which she had managed till now to avoid), and had the sweetness and the loveliness of the child fairly before her gaze, she looked at her as she would have studied a beautiful picture.

Perhaps, too, it made some difference in her feelings to know that she was not to be troubled by Daisy's presence after to-day, and that there could be no undue advantage taken of her "weakness" (so she considered it). At any rate, she darned the little stockings, and then—she actually knelt beside

the lounge and put them upon the little feet herself, keeping an eye upon the kitchen door lest Bridget should come in and find her in that very undignified position.

Little did she dream that Bridget's eye was "taking a squint through the key-hole," and that Bridget's heart was calling down blessings upon her mistress's head for her unusual deed of kindness to the little waif.

"There, now, run into the kitchen; you've been a very good child!" said Miss Betsey, hardly believing her own ears as she heard herself speak.

Daisy nestled her head against the spinster's arm, and then scampered off to Bridget, leaving Miss Betsey in a peculiar frame of mind.

Early the next morning, Mr. Joshua and Daisy started for the depot.

Tabby wandered about the dining-room trying to find a comfortable spot whereon to stretch herself; but none seemed to satisfy, and so she walked restlessly to and fro between dining-room and kitchen. Tabby was, no doubt, missing Daisy.

Bridget, peeling potatoes at the kitchen table, stopped now and then to put the corner of her apron to each eye. Bridget, no doubt, was also missing Daisy.

Miss Betsey, sitting at her work in her rocking-chair, rocked back and forth violently and looked

over at the empty lounge, laying her hand, from some strange impulse, on the arm that had felt the pressure of Daisy's head only a moment on the morning before, and finally went upstairs to set in order rooms which were already spick and span, and to—change the current of her thoughts. Miss Betsey was, no doubt, missing Daisy. (But why?)

On the second day of her brother's absence came a letter for Miss Betsey, which ran as follows:

"DEAR SISTER:

"My letter will surprise you, and I also have been surprised. It will end in a question, dear, and I pray that your answer may be such as will make glad the heart of your brother.

"To begin with, at one of the stations at which we stopped during our journey yesterday, a heavily veiled woman got in and took a seat directly behind ours. When she chanced at one time to speak to the conductor, the sadness of her voice thrilled me with pity, and I knew that she must have passed through great trouble. Presently Daisy, growing restless, got upon her knees and looked over the back of our seat in the faces of the passengers behind. I can never tell you how startled I was, in less than a second of time, to feel the clutch of a hand upon my shoulder, and to hear a cry of surprise and astonishment and gladness (all in one, I might say) close behind my ears. At the same

time Daisy laughed aloud, and leaning far over the back of the seat, threw her arms about the woman's neck with the cry of 'My mamma! my mamma!'

"Of course everybody in the car was as startled as I, and I have no doubt, now that I think it over, that they thought I was kidnapping the little girl. Fortunately there were only a few in the car, and as soon as the mother explained that her child had been lost, and that she was even then searching for it—and I, in my turn, explained how I had the child, and my present purpose in travelling with it, and all that sort of thing, you know—the passengers rejoiced with the mother, and looked upon me with different eyes, and very soon Daisy, her mother, and I were seated in the parlor-car of the train, and the lady was telling me a sad history of suffering and grief of mind.

"Now you know, dear sister, and, I am sure, are glad to know it, that our little lost girl is safe again with her mother; but, Betsey, dear, there is something else, and I am almost afraid you will not be glad this time when I tell it.

"Daisy's mother is none other than Marguerite—dear little Marguerite Le Jeune, the first and only love of your brother's heart! We have not spoken of her in all these years, dear, I know, and yet I am sure you have sometimes thought of her. And I—ah! Betsey, I have grown an old bachelor only because

Marguerite could not be banished from my thoughts, as I tried, God knows, to banish her.

"Well, dear, you would have forgiven her long ago (had you known what I know now) for her treatment of me, and I am glad, knowing all, that I have held no unkind thought of her through these long years. How long they have seemed, haven't they, Betsey? And yet it all happened only fifteen years ago, just about the time our mother died, you remember, dear. It wasn't her fault so much as her father's, and her mother was also to blame.

"They wanted her to marry wealth if she married at all, but you know, if left to herself, Marguerite would have kept her promise to me. She was so young, Betsey—only twenty-one. Don't you think we ought to have been more sorry for her than angry, sister? I hope you will think so.

"Well, she married in a year or two after—after we had bidden each other good-by, and her husband was a society man in every sense of the word, beside being rich, good-looking (which your brother Joshua was not), and only a year older than herself, while I was twenty-seven, you know.

"She didn't love him, she has confessed it to me, and her punishment for false vows began very soon.

"Several children were born to them, but one by one were taken away, and her husband had grown more and more neglectful of her meanwhile. He squandered his money, and what little she possessed

would have gone with it had he been able to obtain possession of it. Far away from home, and amongst strangers (where he had taken her from the first), her lot was sad and exceedingly lonely, as you may imagine, and when the news of the illness of her parents reached her, she felt wickedly glad of the excuse to go home to them, instead of the sorrow she would naturally have felt at the cause of her journey.

"Her husband left her more than ever (after she had buried her parents and returned to her unhappy home), and sometimes would be gone for days.

"When, however, as if to bring her new hope, a little girl was born (the other children were boys), she thought her husband might be won by its winsome beauty and loving little ways, as the weeks grew into months, to leave off his wild ways and turn again to his home.

"Not so! It was only for a time that peace dwelt with poor Marguerite, and then the trouble began again. He dragged her from one place to another, and no sooner would they get settled than she would be left alone in the midst of strangers, with only her little one to keep her company. And so things went on, until the crisis of her misery was reached when he disappeared on the day before Daisy came to us, and, like the thief he was born to be, took with him his wife's dearest possession and only treasure. He left a note behind him in which she was informed that search would be useless, and that he had left her for-

ever. Why he took the child, when he had no love for it, was unexplainable, unless—as the mother believed—it was done merely to give her an extra pang of suffering.

"He had either intended to place it at some orphanage, or to deliberately abandon it, and that he had abandoned it at the depot near our home was very evident.

"Marguerite was on her search for the child when we met her on the train, having heard that a lost girl had been found at Groveville. You remember that Daisy spoke of a 'lady' in the cars, when she said she couldn't find papa. It was no doubt a kind woman amongst the passengers, who amused the child while its father was probably in the smoker, for the little one now tells her mother about being all alone with papa, and he made her stay in the 'big seat,' and went away in another car. I hope, if that were so, that the kind lady was not amongst the killed in the railroad accident, as the wretch who abandoned Marguerite was.

"Yes, Betsey (as I told you I thought it might have been, you remember?), the man's body was found, and identified by his cards and letters; and when Marguerite told me that, she blamed herself because she could not grieve for him.

"It was a wonderful Providence which led the baby-feet straight to our home, sister; and the result is, I believe, still of His planning.

"Now, dear sister, my story is nearly finished, and there is only a little to add, so far as words go; but that little is of great importance to me, sister Betsey, and it means that Marguerite will be my wife in one year from to-day, and a 'Daisy' chain will bind our hearts more closely than ever, for I love the child as its own father never loved it, and Marguerite's heart was mine, you know, long ago, as mine was, is, and ever will be, hers.

"Marguerite fears that you will not welcome her, and that brings me to my question, sister. Will you write a kindly message to her for my sake, and will you tell me that you are not angry with your brother

"JOSHUA?

"P.S.—I shall return in a week. I have business on hand that will detain me until then."

Miss Betsey read the letter through with all sorts of feelings and expressions of countenance. Then she took off her spectacles, laid them on top of her pile of socks, and marched, straight as an arrow, out of the room and up to her bedroom. There she sat down in the darkest corner and cried a real good, old-fashioned cry, which did her good throughout her whole system.

After she had finished that matter entirely, she walked over to the looking-glass and viewed her red eyes and nose. "I'm homelier than a mummy!" she

snapped out at her elderly reflection. "But I was good-looking once, and if I'm an old maid it's my own fault, from first to last. And I don't know but the men were lucky to get off as they did."

She walked aimlessly about the room for a few moments, and then seated herself at her writing-desk.

Presently Bridget went to the nearest letter-box and mailed a letter to "Mr. Joshua Bunn, Groveville, N. Y."

When she returned her mistress had a little conversation with her, and when she again reached the kitchen she danced a wild Irish jig, to the astonishment of old Tabby, who flew in affright under the dining-room lounge.

Marguerite, fair and sweet at the age of thirty-six, and more lovable in manner than when only twenty-one (a gay and happy girl), went down to the parlor of her boarding place in response to Mr. Joshua's summons.

She blushed as he came forward and took her hands; but though the blush came from a happy heart, yet in her blue eyes there was an anxious inquiry, and Joshua Bunn answered it by placing two notes in her hand as he drew her beside him on the shabby little sofa.

She looked at one of them, which was addressed to her, and timidly opened it.

"Oh, Joshua, I am afraid," she said.

"Read mine first, then," said he.

She did so, and then—half tears, half smiles—she opened her own. This is what she read in both :

"DEAR BROTHER : I'm a fool ! Always was one. Come home and let me kiss you.

"BETSEY."

"God bless you, Marguerite ! I always loved you.

"BETSEY."

THE BLIND WIFE.

SOMETHING was "out of kilter" with the harness, and my horse resented it, of course. I coaxed him along until a blacksmith's shop was reached, and left both horse and buggy in his care, whilst I beguiled the time by a stroll up a pretty shaded road, more than tempting after my long ride in the hot sun of a summer's day. "Be back in the matter of an hour, sir," said the man, a straight-figured, good-looking young fellow, with a pair of honest blue eyes, and a cheery ring in his voice. I nodded and walked on, presently conscious that I was exceedingly thirsty, and pretty well tired in the bargain.

Just as I began to look about for a comfortable stone where I might sit down awhile, I saw the roof of a small cottage nestling amongst the trees, and only a short distance beyond.

"Now for a good drink of well-water," said I, "and a rest for tired feet."

The front door was ajar, but nobody was in sight as I rapped gently upon the panel.

Then a sweet-faced young woman appeared, and turning her soft brown eyes upon me, asked:

"Is anything wanted?"

Smiling, and bowing politely, I replied:

"Yes, madam, if you please. Some cool water and a few moments' rest, if I may venture to ask it."

"Certainly, sir; walk in," said she, with a smile that charmed me. "Or perhaps you would prefer to sit here upon the porch. I will bring you a glass of milk if you like."

"I shall be very grateful, madam," I answered, "and will sit here under this beautiful vine. I hope that I am not disturbing you. My horse and buggy are at the blacksmith's shop undergoing repairs, and I have been walking about meanwhile."

"Do you mean the shop to the right of us, sir, down on the main road a piece?"

"Yes, that is the one," I replied. "Do you know the man?"

She laughed merrily.

"He is my husband, sir," was her answer, "and I am glad to be of service to you while you wait for him to attend to your work."

She left me then, and I had full time to notice the daintiness of the room which opened upon the porch

IS ANYTHING WANTED ?

and which bore evidence of a refined taste on the part of its mistress. The furniture was plain, to be sure, and the carpet only a cheap one, but the muslin curtains were white as snow, the carpet was spotlessly clean, and the furniture dusted to as fine a polish as its material would admit of.

A cheery little canary hung before one of the windows, and hopped contentedly from perch to perch, singing its little song of happiness without a shade of envy at the lot of its uncaged relations out amongst the trees. Some fragrant flowers adorned a small table near by, and books were scattered about in a homelike way, ready to be picked up and enjoyed at any leisure moment.

But the prettiest thing in the room was the dear baby girl who was sitting on the floor amidst her toys and with a small gray kitten snuggled up in her lap.

She was, I judged, about three or four years of age, and as pretty as a little picture. A few sunbeams slipping in through the half-shaded windows discovered and played with the golden curls on the dear little head, and a pair of violet eyes gazed at me curiously.

"What is your name, little one?" I asked.

"Mamma's dirl!" was the grave reply, the violet eyes still fastened solemnly upon my face.

"'Mamma's dirl,'" I quoted laughingly. "But what is your other name?"

"Papa's dirl," was the musical reply from the baby lips.

"But what is mamma's name, darling?"

"Mamma's name 'Sweetheart,'" she said placidly; and then she held up her kitten, with the dimples growing in both cheeks, and added:

"Dis is name 'Pet.'"

"Oh! what a lot of pretty names," I said, leaving my seat to kiss the sweet child; and just then the door opened and my hostess entered, a pitcher of milk in one hand and a generous sized tumbler in the other.

"I have been talking to baby," said I, stepping forward and relieving the young woman of the pitcher and glass, which I noticed she held out to me a little uncertainly, as though not sure I would receive them.

Smiling, she asked: "Where are you, baby?" And instantly the little voice piped the reply:

"Here I is, sweetheart." And the baby dropped her kitten upon the floor as she ran lovingly to her mother's side and looked adoringly at the sweet face above her.

I had been somewhat surprised at the mother's failure to observe baby's whereabouts, since the child was in plain view before our eyes, but remarked pleasantly:

"Your little one looks like her papa, I think; I see more of his face than your own in the little features."

She put her hand caressingly upon the golden head at her side, and oh! the sadness which overspread her lovely face as in low, tremulous tones she answered me:

"I hope so, sir. Our friends, and grandma also, tell me that she is the living image of her dear father; but for myself—I have never seen the face of my little girl."

She choked a little, and stopped abruptly, but in a moment lifted her face to me with a brave smile.

"Madam, pardon me," I said. "I would not have believed it; I—I am very sorry——"

"I am told," she interrupted, still smiling, "that my eyes do not show their lack of sight very much, and for my husband's sake I am glad of that. But, poor John! he has had a hard time with only a blind, helpless woman for a wife, and one so little able to be of any help to him. He deserves a better lot, dear man, and I told him so from the first."

"Ah, now, madam," I replied, looking with wonder at those brown, beautiful eyes, so full of life even yet that it was impossible to believe they were blind, "I am sure that John would not let you speak in that way if he were here, and I shall not listen to it. I am positive that he would rather have his little woman just as she is, than not to have had her at all."

She smiled happily, and replied:

"That's what he's always telling me, sir. God

bless him! But he's too good for me. I don't mean to be impatient, or to fret and worry over what can't be helped, but oh!"—she knelt upon the floor and twined her arms so tenderly about her child—"if only for one little moment, just *one* little minute of my life, I could see my baby's face—if I could only have one little glimpse of my darling's dear wee face, I would be content to live upon the memory of that one glimpse, God knows I would, during the rest of my life."

She rested her cheek against the soft face of the little child, and my eyes filled with tears of sympathy. Baby was too young to understand all that had been said, but she knew well enough that mamma was sad, and while putting her soft kisses on the sorrowful face, and patting with her wee hands the cheeks of her blind mother, she looked at me with a worried expression, as though I had hurt mamma and she wished I would go away.

So, after a few words of sympathy, and warm thanks for the hospitality shown me, I took my departure, and I am not ashamed to confess that, man though I was, I wet my handkerchief with many tears for the life-long grief of that young woman, and the "John" who loved her so truly in spite of her affliction.

She stood at the cottage door and watched me down the road (if I may use so inconsistent a sentence in regard to eyes that could not "watch"),

and presently I heard the baby's voice cry out happily:

"Man's all dorn, sweetheart; tum in!"

"What a strange title for the lips of such a baby to use," I thought; "but how sweet, and how suggestive of the tender atmosphere of affection in which the little one has been brought up thus far through her short life!"

When I reached again the blacksmith's shop, the man stood at the door, and pointed to my horse and buggy beneath the shelter of a grand old tree.

"I've had the good fortune to meet with your pretty little wife," said I, as I counted out the price named for the repairing of my harness. "I've had quite a rest, too, at your cosey little cottage."

His face lighted up with pleasure.

"Well, then, sir, I'll be bound you've seen the sweetest woman on this earth, and as smart a little nest as can be built out of boards, sir, if I do say it that did the building of it."

"You're right, my man," was my answer; "and with all my heart I am sorry that with her own beautiful eyes she cannot see her pretty home."

The glad light died out of his face and a sadness settled there.

"You didn't know she was blind, I'll wager, sir," he said, presently, "when you first saw Dora; now, did you? Nobody's like to guess it—I mean, no stranger

would, first off, when meeting her. Ain't they beautiful eyes, sure enough, sir, come to look right into them ?" with an eager questioning I was glad to answer as he evidently wanted me to.

"I can hardly believe that they are blind," said I, "they are so alive in expression."

He fairly beamed, and gave my hand an energetic shake.

"Was she born blind ?" I asked ; and he laughed a little proudly.

"Born blind ? Why, sir, there weren't a pair of eyes in the village brighter and sweeter and better seeing than those eyes of Dora's, sir ! Born blind ? Not a bit of it !"

Then glancing at his watch, he looked up and down the road.

"There's nobody coming with a job for me just now," said he, "and there's plenty o' time before supper—we have it rather early at my house, so's I can get back and do a bit of work early in the evening —so if you like, sir, and can spare time for it, I'll tell you how it came about."

I seated myself willingly beneath the large tree, and the young husband sat beside me, while my horse grazed peacefully upon the broad strip of grass beside the road.

"Well, sir, you see I was a young lad of twenty-one years when I went to live at the farm owned by Dora's father. You may have passed the place a

mile back to the left of the road. (Maybe you'll recall the location better if you took notice of the big tree standing half split in two, and black from the stroke of lightning that blasted it, just at the fork of the road before you pass the farm.)

"Well, sir, that's where I was working for Dora's father. His name was Thorn, and he had the most motherly woman for a wife that a motherless fellow like myself could have desired to find when making his home with strangers, as I had to, you see. Dora was his only child, and nineteen years old. And, sir, talk about pretty girls! Why, there wasn't a prettier, sweeter thing on earth than Dora Thorn then. She hadn't known a sorrow to make her sad in face or heart. She was the pride of her folks, and the whole village, I reckon, for that matter. The boys all fell in love with her—those who, like myself, worked on the farm and roomed in the big barn chambers, as well as the fellows who called themselves the village beaux, you know.

"As for me, I was a bit shy at first, being a stranger, and sort of afraid of getting snubbed, you see. But I soon fell in with the others, and followed their example besides in falling in love with Dora. She didn't seem to care particularly for any one of us fellows, but she was jolly with us all, and that's the most we could get out of her. Now, perhaps, sir, you have never been in love with a girl yourself and won't understand what I mean when I tell you that it

wasn't long before I found myself feeling as though I'd just as soon be dead as alive unless Dora Thorn would care for me as I cared for her——"

(Here I interrupted my man by explaining that as I had a wife and three big daughters, all dearer to me than the whole human family combined could have been, I might possibly be supposed to know something of the condition of his mind in regard to Dora.

Whereupon he seized my hand and again shook it delightedly, saying that he could enjoy telling his story much more for the knowledge that I had "been there" myself, and wouldn't laugh at him for a silly fellow.)

"Well, sir, it's passing queer how, when a man falls in love, it seems as if the world has all of a sudden grown more beautiful than you ever found it before, and you somehow feel as if you want to be kind to everybody, and you sort of overflow with liking for folks, and with wanting to do 'em little favors and such. And I kept thinking to myself that if just loving Dora (without even knowing whether I was going to be loved back again) was making me think the world so lovely and so happy a place to live in, what ever would it be, and how could I bear the happiness, if she loved me back again after all? And I used to walk more on air, it seemed, in those days of thought and love for Dora, than on the earth, for all I was toiling away on earth with the rest of the boys, and earning my salt with a good will.

"Some of the fellows got tired hanging around a girl who didn't care whether they did or not, and so they fell out of the ranks; but a few of us held on to the fort, and I—I tell you I clung hard to the hope that I'd come out way ahead of the others at last, and there wasn't a day when I wasn't hunting for chances to let Dora see how I felt, whether *she* felt so or not.

"Once or twice some fellow found me out—you can't hide a big feeling like mine all the time, if there are prying eyes about, you know—so I was laughed at now and then by some fellow, and he'd say jokingly: 'Say, John, that's a deep prick you got from that thorn t'other day, wasn't it?' or, 'John, what'll cure a thorn-prick, hey?' But, Lor' bless you, sir, I didn't care, and the fellows were too good to bother me before the girl herself. Well, I was a wild sort of lad, sir, I may as well confess it. I'd steal out of the window of nights and go off on any sort of lark the wild fellows of the village would plan. A man of twenty-one's only a boy, after all, and I liked playing tricks with tricksters far too much, I suppose. Dora used to look at me reprovingly sometimes, when I'd get caught in playing some prank (after work hours) on a neighbor, and her mother, bless her! used to give me good advice, and talk like a mother to me, especially after I began to like going to the tavern for a good time. The farmer—he'd blow me up and threaten to send me off the place, but Dora always

came along in time to take my part, and get her father to be patient with me. And, after all, I didn't do anything really wicked, as it were. I never drank as some of the fellows did—one glass now and then, but nothing to make me forget myself at any time—and nobody had ever lost a penny through any dishonest action of mine. I could swear to that.

"I loved Dora more and more, and she was so gentle and sweet with me, and I'd catch her beautiful eyes looking at me when she supposed I didn't know it, and she always had a smile for me when I brought her posies and pretty grasses, or when I carved with my knife (for I was quite a whittler, sir) some pretty little useful gift for her. But she never would let me say anything that seemed lover-like to her, somehow; she always ran away laughing if I began the least word that was like to betray any especial feeling, and it used to nettle me sometimes, I tell you!

"Well, things went along like that all winter and half way through the summer, and I was so far gone that it riled me if a fellow was seen talking longer than five minutes to Dora alone, and—well, there's an old song, sir, that runs something after this fashion:

> "'Love is like a dizziness;
> It won't let a young man
> Go about his business.'

"And if you'll believe me, it was true in my case, for I couldn't attend to my work half properly.

When I went to the fields, the birds sang songs of Dora, and in listening to them I forgot to do a thing else but just sit down and think about Dora, and all the while I kept thinking and thinking what a for-

I SAW DORA AND ONE OF THE BOYS.

lorn, empty place this world would be to me if Dora were not alive in it.

"Well, one day, when I was searching a strayed cow, and had got into the woods, I saw Dora and one of the boys coming along, and I stepped deeper into the bushes so's not to be seen. I meant to do a mean

thing, sir, and I did it. I listened to hear what they were talking about, and I heard her telling Sam that it wasn't any use for him to ask her to marry him, because she never could do it, never in the world, and that was all she could ever say if he kept on forever.

"Well, I was so happy after they had gone on, and so relieved (because, you see, I'd been having a sort of fear about that fellow for quite a while), that I sang and whistled all the way home, and that night, I don't know what possessed me, but said I to Sam, 'Old fellow, so you got the mitten to-day, I hear.' 'Who told you?' growled he. 'Oh, a few birds,' said I, laughing. And then I kept on chaffing him, not so much to be mean as because I felt so light-hearted, you know, to find out that Dora wasn't in love with Sam, after all.

"Sam got mad, and vowed he'd get even with me, and then pretty soon we settled down for sleep, and the next day I forgot all about that he was mad, and went about my work as usual. A few days after that the old man wanted me to drive to the village with him for a load of wood. I didn't relish the job much, for it was a sort of off day on the farm, and Dora had sort of promised me a walk that afternoon. I was just full of that anticipation, I can tell you, sir, and it wasn't quite up to my liking when the farmer called me off, you may be sure.

"Well, after the wood matter was attended to, the

old man wanted to see a friend about a mortgage, and bidding me wait a bit, he went off up the street. I sat in the wagon, not overpleased at the delay, and hot and out of sorts with the sultry weather. We were close by the hotel there, and presently Sam came out on the piazza and called, 'Hello! Come in, John, and sample a present of cherry rum my uncle has sent me from the West!'

"I ought to explain that Sam's cousin kept the hotel, and Sam, when not working out time for anybody, stayed with his cousin.

"Well, sir, I being so hot, and, it seemed to me, too, thirstier than I'd ever been in my life before, of course I was glad enough to sample anything that came along, and I jumped out of the wagon willingly enough. Sam and two or three fellows were enjoying the cherry rum, and Sam went to the end of the counter and fetched a glass for me. 'That's good stuff,' said I, drinking it, and smacking my lips with the rest of them. 'Thank ye, Sam.'

"'All right, John,' said he. 'I hope you'll have a nice journey home. This is a toaster of a day. How's the folks out to the farm?' 'Chipper as I am,' said I, laughing; and then the farmer came along and we started for home.

"There was a terrible big cloud coming on, and the sky looked angry all of a sudden.

"'Lucky we ain't got far to go,' said the old man, and I nodded 'yes,' for somehow I began to feel so

sleepy that I couldn't help shutting my eyes now and then. They felt heavy, you see, and I'd had a sort of sun-headache all along.

"'Going to have a thunder-storm, sure's you're born,' said Mr. Thorn, whipping up the horses, and looking up at the sky which grew blacker and blacker.

"Presently I found myself reeling in my seat, and bumped up against the old man pretty hard.

"He looked me over kind of sharp, and I had an idea that, finding me on the hotel piazza, he might think I'd been drinking something stronger than just cherry rum.

"So I pulled myself up again, and said I:

"'I guess I'm extra tired, somehow; this is about the hottest day we've had, ain't it?'

"'Too hot for a young fellow like you to be filling yourself with stuff to make you hotter, I reckon,' he said severely. 'John, you've been drinking, and you're getting too near home for you to be making a spectacle of yourself. I don't think I ever saw you so far gone before, and, indeed, I didn't know that it was in you to take as much aboard as you've done this time, it's plain to see!'

"I felt hurt at that, and mad too, and says I:

"'Mr. Thorn, I haven't drunk a drop that—' And then I felt myself giving way, and was sort of half conscious that the team stopped and I was being hauled out of the wagon, and then I heard a singing in my ears, and that was the last I knew

until, presently, some heavy drops of rain splashing on my face must have awakened me, for when I knew what I was about, I found myself by the side of the road, under some trees, and in danger of getting drenched if the clouds should burst before I could get home.

"Well, I was wide awake in a minute, and like a flash I saw how things were. That rascally Sam had drugged me in that cherry bounce, and had 'got even' with me, as he had said he would.

"He wanted the old man to think I was 'dead drunk clean through' (as the boys expressed it), and the old man had obliged him, that was very sure. He had actually believed me greatly intoxicated, and having no patience with any of the boys when that happened, he had forgotten that I had never been in that state before, and had bundled me out of the wagon to get over the supposed 'spree' and home again as well as I could.

"Well, I was so angry that I declared to myself I wouldn't go home until midnight, and give them a scare which would teach Mr. Thorn, at any rate, not to make any mistake like that again; and as for Sam, if he showed his face at the farm again I would duck him in the horse-pond until he cried for mercy. Then I thought of Dora—sweet, brown-eyed Dora!—the girl whom I loved with heart and soul, and who would love me back again, I was sure, some day. How would she feel at the treatment I had received? First I

thought she would pity me and take my part in the matter; and then I thought: No; she would, of course, believe as her father did, for I had been in so many wild scrapes, and had been hauled over the coals so often, that it would only be natural for her, and her mother also, to believe me at last not worth their liking or forgiving.

"Well, sir, there I lay under the trees, too hot with rage to care whether the rain caught me or not. A few drops were falling now and then, but there was to be a squencher before long. The skies were getting blacker still, and though the storm was holding off a bit, yet I knew there'd be a fight up above before many minutes more.

"I looked at my watch and found that it was six o'clock, and I must have been half an hour or more lying under the trees there. A dangerous place in a thunder-storm, wasn't it? But, bless you, I was that mad clear through, that I believe I'd as lief been struck as not, so as to pay the folks off, and the old man particularly. And speaking of my watch, sir, I did a bit of moralizing before long as I held it in my hand. It was a cheap-looking affair, a nickel case and white-faced thing, bought with some of my first earnings as a lad. But in spite of its plain appearance it was the best timekeeper I ever saw, and even the farmer himself would go by my time when winding and setting his kitchen clock, if he didn't chance to have his own about him. And I thought to myself—

after my temper had begun to cool off a bit, and I grew hungry and uncomfortable at last—'John, my boy, you know the reason you can depend upon your watch is because its heart is good and honest stuff. Good stuff made good works, and the watch has been steady and true since it was made, for all it's only a plain, cheap-looking affair to look at outside. Now, you are no great shakes as a man, and you don't appear to be always reliable, and just now you're decidedly shabby to see. But if you're made of good stuff you'll show it yet, and do good work, never fear! You've been a trifle fast; some watches are when they are not so very long out of the manufacturers' hands. But all you need is a little regulating, and you know, if no one else does, that your heart is an honest, true one, so far as intentions and thought are concerned. Your works are good, but your case is tarnished, and needs the polishing of good sense and noble ambition to make it attractive to people who know the real from the false. Get up from the ground and put your pride in your pocket. Go home and explain to the poor, mistaken old farmer just what really was the matter, and nobody will feel so sorry for his unintentional injustice as he will. Eat your supper and treat the whole thing as a joke, and after this try and leave off wild ways and foolish larks, which only make you pass for a worthless old ticker, and not even worth the nickel-plate about you.' . . .

"You are smiling, sir, and no wonder. But,

really, that sort of moralizing did me a heap of good, for I got up from the grass, stretched myself, brushed the dust off clothes and brain, and started for the house like a sensible man.

"But, oh! sir, if only—if only I had done all that a little sooner, I should have been spared the suffering which came to my dear girl and myself. For listen to what happened:

"I presently heard my name called, and the voice was Dora's, sir—her own sweet voice reaching me in the midst of the blackness all around, as the clouds were gathering and massing forces more speedily.

"'John,' she cried, 'where are you? Answer me.'

"I was beyond the bend of the road, but knew I could see her in a moment when I turned the bend; and meanwhile I shouted back: 'Here, Dora! I'm coming, my girl!' and ran with all my speed to prevent her coming any further from home."

The man paused here and covered his face with his hands, and I said to him that he would better not tell me any more, since it hurt him, I could see. But ere long he lifted his head again and drew his hand across his forehead.

"I've never told the story before, sir," said he, "though, God knows, it repeats itself in my heart and mind over and over again. Somehow, for a minute I seemed to be back again on that very day and spot of ground, and— Well, I ran fast to get

around the bend before she did, thinking that we might yet escape the storm; but just as I turned and saw my dear girl running bare-headed and with labored breath toward me, there came a terrible, blinding flash, and on the instant with it a peal of thunder as if the world had been exploded at last, and—and—I saw Dora fall directly in front of the big tree I mentioned to you when we first sat down here, sir, close by the house, and which, I will confess to you, sir, I wish might be cut down, root and branch, and forever removed from sight, I have such feelings whenever I see it.

"Well, the shock and the glare together nearly stunned me, but when I had gotten my wits together I ran to Dora and lifted her up, calling for help, and feeling sure that she was dead.

"But when we got her to the house, and a doctor —who was near by at a neighbor's—was called, she rallied into consciousness again, and the first thing she said was:

"'John, dear, are you here?'

"'Right here, my own darling,' said I, not caring if the whole world full of people were hearing, and kneeling down to look right into her eyes; 'don't you see me, dear?'

"She looked troubled, but replied: 'No, because there's no light, you know. Why am I kept in the dark so? Do bring a lamp, John. I'm not hurt, and this darkness is dreadful!'

"Oh, sir, there we were, her mother and father, the doctor and I, all standing about the bed, and the room as bright as two big lights could make it; and her dear eyes, as beautiful and bright as ever they were, looking straight at us, and—and—not seeing us, sir!

"Ah, well, I can't tell you all that followed, sir; you'll know well enough that it was hard telling her the truth after the doctor had examined her eyes, and told us that the lightning, though it had spared her life, had taken away the sight of the brown eyes forever.

"It was a time of terrible grief to us all, and it nearly killed my poor girl at first. Then, after a long while, she grew calm, and I—who had gone on loving her more than ever before—one day asked her to give me the right to love and work for her always, and said that even if I could not have that right by marrying her, I should claim it by the right of my suffering when I remembered that if she had not gone out into the storm to look for and call me home, her beautiful eyes would not now be needing to borrow the sight of others about her.

"And then she felt for my hand, and put her own into it, and she said with a smile:

"'I shouldn't have gone out to find anybody but the lad I loved so dearly that I could not rest until I had found him.'

"'Then you will marry me, Dora?' I asked,

almost crying for the gladness of her words, man though I was.

"And she said: 'If you want a blind wife, John, dear, I am yours, and will do the best I can, in the dark, to make you a good wife.'

"Ah, sir, I was more than blest then! And I had long before been restored to my old place in the farmer's heart (he blamed himself, sir, for all that happened, and was in a terrible way for weeks), and shown greater kindnesses, too, for Dora's sake. I had somehow changed my nature, and the wild times I had been fond of seemed hateful to me then. As for Sam—well, sir, I forgave him for what he did *me* in the way of harm, but for all he caused Dora to suffer I can't say that I can feel it easy to forgive him, though I know the command is that we must forgive those who trespass against us. It comes hard to say it, but I would not do him a harm, sir, for all my feelings against him; and I think he feels now, at this late day even, that the real blame should rest on him.

"Well, as no man on earth could love a woman more than I loved Dora, and as there wasn't any special reason why we should wait—except that the dear girl kept fearing she would be a burden upon me, and felt that I ought to go out into the world and give myself a chance to love somebody better fitted for me than she would be, with her poor blind eyes making her so helpless—why, I began to be impatient

to give Dora my name, and make her mine forever and ever as soon as a minister could be brought to the house.

"'Do you realize it all, John, darling?' she asked on the night before we were married. 'Do you realize that you are going to saddle yourself with very troublesome cares, and——'

"But I interrupted her with kisses, and told her that I realized that no man in the world would ever find so dear and white-souled a sweetheart to make a wife of as I had found, and that if she was content I was a hundred times more so.

"And the next day we were married, sir, and we lived at home a while, until finally the old man died and the place passed into other hands, and I built my little nest yonder for Dora and the baby-bird who had flown down from heaven to nestle there with us, amongst the trees. And the dear old mother came to have her home with us, too, and we are as happy as can be—save for the one grief which the dear Lord knows we cannot quite put out of our hearts.

"But there was one time, sir, when Dora's blindness seemed almost more than she could bear.

"It was when baby came. My sweet little wife, she passed her hand softly over the little features—we were watching her, and our hearts were fit to break, I do assure you—and then she turned her face to the wall and sobbed as if her heart would cry its life away. I went and knelt down beside her and

laid my cheek against her head. Then she whispered to me: 'John, dear, does baby look like you? Oh, do tell me yes!' And to please her I said it was the very image of me. She turned and laid her fingers again upon her baby's little face, and all she said was: 'Oh! it is hard, so hard, so hard to bear!'

"That was the last complaint I ever heard her make, would you believe it, sir? She has been the dearest and most patient of women, the sweetest of wives, and the tenderest, truest of mothers!" There was a moment of silence, and then, springing to his feet, he said: "Speaking of patience, sir, you've been as patient a man as I ever saw! Here I've been keeping you from your journey, listening to my matters, and I'm sure I'm obliged to you for the interest you've taken in my story, sir."

"Not at all," I replied. "I have been greatly interested, and have a question to ask. Baby called her mother 'sweetheart'; where did she catch that? It sounded oddly from baby lips."

The young fellow laughed heartily. "Ah, I see that baby has betrayed me," he said, and a little flush crept into his cheeks.

"Maybe you'll laugh at me, but I'm as much the lover now, sir, as before we married, and I've always had a trick of calling my wife 'sweetheart' (for that's what she is, and no mistake). And baby has caught it somehow, and hardly ever calls her mother by any other name. Did you notice, sir, how tenderly the